THE

ENGLISH PREACHER.

VOL. II.

THE

ENGLISH PREACHER:

OR,

SERMONS

ON THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS OF

RELIGION AND MORALITY,

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SERMON I.

ON SINCERITY.

JOHN, i. 47.

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming unto him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.

THE whole nation of the Jews were Israelites by natural descent, being the seed of Jacob or Israel; but in a special and more excellent sense, none are esteemed the true posterity of Israel, but those who

 resemble

reſemble this father of their nation in true piety and goodneſs; for, as the apoſtle reaſons, "they are not all Iſrael, who are of Iſrael;" they only are Iſraelites indeed, who reſemble good old Jacob, in the ſincerity of his piety, and the ſimplicity of his diſpoſition and manners. Our Saviour ſeems here to allude to that character which is given of Jacob, "That he was a plain man," or, as the Hebrew word ſignifies, "a perfect and ſincere man," in oppoſition to his brother Eſau, who is ſaid to be cunning: ſo that to be an Iſraelite indeed, is to be an honeſt man, without fraud and guile, without any arts of hypocriſy and deceit.

In ſpeaking of this virtue of ſincerity, which is the higheſt character and commendation of a good man, I ſhall conſider it as reſpecting God and man. As it reſpects God, it denotes the truth and reality of our piety and devotion towards him. As it regards men, it ſignifies a ſimplicity of mind and manners, in our carriage and converſation one towards another. Both theſe are included, and very probably were intended, in the character which our Saviour here gives of

of Nathaniel: "Behold, an Iſraelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

Sincerity, as it reſpects God, implies that we heartily believe in, and fear, and honour him, and that the outward expreſſions of our piety and obedience are the genuine iſſue of our inward apprehenſions of him, and affections towards him. More particularly,

Our piety is then ſincere, when the chief reaſons and predominant motives of it are religious; and I call *that* a religious motive, which regards God and another world, in oppoſition to men, and to our preſent temporal advantages; when the principal motives of our piety, are a ſenſe of God's authority over us, and of our duty and obligation to him; a fear of his diſpleaſure and threatnings, and the hope of the glorious reward which he hath promiſed to obedience. Theſe motives are properly religious, becauſe they reſpect God, and are the arguments to obedience which he himſelf offers to us, to perſuade us to our duty. And *that* is a ſincere piety, which is wrought in us by theſe conſiderations, how unequally ſoever they may be mixed: for in moſt men fear is often

more prevalent than love, and, in case of great temptation, may preserve men from sin, when perhaps no other consideration will do it.

Sincere piety must likewise be rooted in the heart, and be a living principle within us; for, as the apostle reasons in another case, "he is not a Jew who is "one outwardly, but he who is one in-"wardly, and in the heart:" without this, all outward acts of piety and devotion are hypocrisy, a picture of religion, and a form of godliness, without the life and power of it.

Another evidence of sincere piety is, when men are religious in private and in secret, as well as in public and in the open view of men. He is truly devout, who is so in his family and in his closet, where he hath no witness but God and his own soul, as well as in the church. He is an honest man, who will make good his word, and perform his promise, when no proof can be made of it, and no law compel him to it, as readily as if it had been made before a hundred witnesses. He is sincerely just, who will not detain from another his right, though he be ignorant of it; nor wrong any man, though

though he could do it with all the ſecreſy and ſafety in the world; who will not impoſe upon another's ignorance or unſkilfulneſs, though ever ſo much to his own advantage. He is truly charitable, who would not only as ſoon, but rather ſooner give his alms in ſecret, than in the ſight of men. And he is truly grateful, who, when there is occaſion and opportunity, will acknowledge a kindneſs and requite a benefit to the relations of his deceaſed friend, though he be ſure that all memory of the obligation died with him, and that none are conſcious of it but God and his own conſcience. And indeed there is ſcarcely any act of piety and virtue, the ſincerity of which may not by this evidence be known by us; as on the contrary, a man may certainly conclude himſelf a hypocrite, if he be not the ſame in the preſence of God and his own conſcience that he is in the ſight of men.

Farther; Sincere piety muſt be attended with a conſtant tenour of goodneſs in the general courſe of our lives, and a uniform and univerſal obedience to all the laws of God. He is not ſincerely good, who doth not ſeriouſly endeavour to be

as good as he can; or who contents himself with obſerving ſome of the divine precepts while he lives in the neglect of the reſt. I fear it is too common a fault, even among thoſe who make a great profeſſion of piety, that they are not ſufficiently ſenſible of the obligation and neceſſity of the duties which reſpect our converſation with one another. Men do not ſeem to conſider, that God did not give laws to us, for his own ſake, but ours; and therefore that he did not only deſign that we ſhould honour him, but that we ſhould be happy in one another; for which reaſon he joins with our humble and dutiful deportment towards himſelf, the offices of juſtice and charity towards others. "He hath ſhewed thee, O "man, what is good; and what doth the "Lord require of thee, but to do juſtice, "and to love mercy, and to walk humbly "with thy God? And this command-"ment have we from him, that he who "loveth God, ſhould love his brother alſo." And yet it is too viſible that many, who make a great profeſſion of piety towards God, are very defective in moral duties, very unpeaceable, and turbulent in their ſpirits, very peeviſh and paſſionate, very con-

conceited and cenſorious, as if their profeſſion of godlineſs did exempt them from the practice of ſocial virtues. But men muſt not think by ſome acts, either of outward or inward piety, to compound with God for the neglect of mercy and judgment; or to demand it as a right from men to be excuſed from the great duties and virtues of human life; or pretend to be above them, becauſe they relate chiefly to this world, and to the temporal happineſs of men; as if it were the privilege of great devotion, to give a licenſe to men to be peeviſh and froward, ſour and moroſe, ſupercilious and cenſorious in their behaviour towards others. If we would approve the integrity of our hearts to God, and evidence to ourſelves the ſincerity of our obedience, we ought impartially to regard all the laws of God, and every part of our duty; and if we do not, our heart is not right in the ſight of God.

The laſt evidence I ſhall mention of the ſincerity of our religion is, if it hold out againſt perſecution, and endure the fiery trial. This is the utmoſt proof of our integrity, when we are called to bear the croſs, to be willing then to expoſe all

our wordly intereſt, and even life itſelf, for the cauſe of God, and religion. This is a trial to which God doth not always call his faithful ſervants; but they are always to be prepared for it, in the purpoſe and reſolution of their minds. This our Saviour makes the great mark of a true diſciple: "if any man," ſaith he, "will be my diſciple, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me." This is a certain ſign, that men "have received the word into good ground," and are well rooted in their religion, when they are not ſhaken by theſe fierce aſſaults; "for many," as our Saviour tells us, "hear the word, and with joy receive it; but having not root in themſelves, they endure but for a while, and when perſecution, or tribulation ariſeth, becauſe of the word, preſently they are offended:" nay ſome, when they ſee perſecution coming at a diſtance, are careful to make their retreat, and "agree with their adverſary, while he is yet in the way."

Having thus conſidered ſincerity as it regards piety towards God, let us in the next place, conſider it as it reſpects men.

Now ſincerity, in our behaviour towards

wards each other, implies a ſimplicity of mind and manners; ſingleneſs of heart, diſcovering itſelf in a conſtant plainneſs and honeſt openneſs of behaviour, free from all inſidious devices, and low arts of craft and cunning; from all falſe appearance and empty ſhew of what we are not, either by word or action. Contrary to this virtue are, I fear, many of thoſe compliments, which are current in converſation, and which are often nothing but mere words, to fill up the vacancies of diſcourſe. If we pretend to that kindneſs and eſteem for perſons, which either in truth we have not, or not to that degree which our expreſſions ſeem to import, we are guilty of flattery; a very odious kind of inſincerity, which abuſeth men into a vain and fooliſh opinion of themſelves, and an ill-grounded confidence of the good-will of others towards them. It plays upon our ſelf-love, which greedily catches at any thing that tends to magnify and advance us; for God knows, we are all too apt to think and make the beſt of ourſelves: ſo that very few tempers have wiſdom and firmneſs enough to be proof againſt flattery. It requires great conſideration, and reſolute modeſty and humility, to reſiſt

the insinuations of this serpent; yea, a little rudeness and moroseness of nature, a prudent distrust of mankind, to enable a man in good earnest to reject and despise it.

And besides that all hypocrisy and insincerity is mean in itself, having falshood at the bottom; it is also often made use of, to the prejudice of others, in their rights and interests. For not only dissimulation is contrary to sincerity, because it consists in a vain shew of what we are not; but there are likewise other qualities and actions more inconsistent with integrity, which are of a more injurious and mischievous consequence, as falshood, and fraud, and perfidiousness, and infinite little arts of deceit, which men practise upon one another in their ordinary conversation and intercourse. The former is great vanity, but this is gross iniquity.

And yet these qualities dextrously managed, so as not to lie too plain and open to discovery, are looked upon by many, as signs of great depth and shrewdness, admirable instruments of business, and necessary means for compassing our designs. Though by those who have suffered by them, and felt the mischief

chief of them, they are always accounted diſhoneſt, yet among the generality of ſpectators, they paſs for great policy; as if the very ſkill of governing and managing human affairs, conſiſted in theſe tricks and devices. But he that looks more narrowly into them, and will have the patience to obſerve the end of them, will find them to be great follies, and that it is only for want of true wiſdom and underſtanding, that men "turn "aſide to tricks, and make diſſimulation "and lies their refuge." It is Solomon's obſervation, that "he who walketh up-"rightly, walketh ſurely; but the folly "of fools is deceit:" that is, the moſt egregious piece of folly that any man can be guilty of, is to play the knave. I will not deny but theſe low arts, may ſerve a preſent turn, and perhaps ſucceſsfully enough; but true wiſdom goeth deeper, and reacheth farther, looking to the end of things, and regarding the future as well as the preſent. It clearly diſcerns that craft and cunning are only uſeful for the preſent occaſion, whereas integrity is of laſting uſe, and will be ſerviceable to us upon all occaſions, and in the whole courſe of our lives; and

that diſſimulation and deceit, though they may do ſome preſent execution in buſineſs, muſt by degrees weaken, and at laſt deſtroy a man's reputation, which is a much more uſeful ſubſtantial, and laſting inſtrument of proſperity and ſucceſs in human affairs, than any tricks and devices whatſover. Thus have I conſidered this great virtue of ſincerity, both as it regards God, and the mutual converſation and intercourſe of men one with another.

And now, having explained the nature of ſincerity to God and man; what remains is to perſuade men to endeavour after this excellent quality, and to practiſe it in all the words and actions of their lives.

Let us then, in the firſt place, be ſincere in our religion, and ſerve God in truth and uprightneſs of heart, out of conſcience of our duty and obligations to him, and not with ſiniſter reſpect to our private intereſt or paſſion, or to the public approbation or cenſure of men. Let us never make uſe of religion to ſerve any baſe and unworthy ends, cloaking our deſigns of covetouſneſs, or ambition, or revenge, with pretences of conſcience

ſcience and zeal for God. But let us endeavour after the reality of religion, always remembring that ſincere piety doth not conſiſt in ſhew, but ſubſtance; not in appearance, but in effect; that the ſpirit of true religion is ſtill and calm, charitable and peaceable, making as little ſhew and parade as poſſible; that a ſincerely good man does not affect vain oſtentation, and an unſeaſonable diſcovery of his good qualities, but endeavours rather really to be, than to ſeem religious, and, of the two, rather ſeeks to conceal his piety, than to ſet it forth with pomp; gives his alms privately; prays to God in ſecret, and makes no appearance of religion, but in ſuch fruits and effects as cannot be hid; in the quiet and ſilent virtues of humility, and meekneſs, and patience, of peace and charity; in governing his paſſions, and taking heed not to offend with his tongue, by ſlander and calumny, by envious detraction or raſh cenſure, or by any word or action that may be to the hurt and prejudice of his neighbour. But, on the contrary, it is a very bad ſign, if a man affect to make a great ſhew of his religion; if he blow a trumpet before his good works, and by

by extraordinary appearances of devotion ſummon the eyes of men to behold him, and do, as it were, call aloud to them to take notice of his piety, "and to come and ſee his zeal for the Lord of hoſts." It is not impoſſible but ſuch a man, with all his vanity and oſtentation, may have ſome real goodneſs in him; but he is as the hypocrites are, and acts as like one as poſſible; and by the great profeſſions that he makes, with wiſe and conſiderate men he brings in queſtion the ſincerity of his religion.

And with the ſincerity of our piety towards God, let us join ſimplicity and integrity of manners in our converſation with men. Let us ſtrictly charge ourſelves to uſe truth and plainneſs in all our words and doings; let our tongue be ever the true interpreter of our mind; our expreſſions the lively image of our thoughts and affections, and our outward actions exactly agreeable to our inward purpoſes and intentions.

Hypocriſy is a very vain and fooliſh thing; it is deſigned to cheat others, but is in truth deceiving ourſelves. No man would flatter or diſſemble, did he believe he were ſeen or diſcovered; an open

open knave is a great fool, who deſtroys at once both his deſign and his reputation: and this is the caſe of every hypocrite; all the diſagreement which is between his tongue and his thoughts, his actions and his heart is open to that eye, from which nothing can be hid; "for "the ways of man are before the eyes "of the Lord, and he ſeeth all his go-"ings; there is no darkneſs nor ſhadow "of death, where the workers of iniqui-"ty may hide themſelves."

But truth and ſincerity have all the advantages of appearance, and many more. If the ſhew of any thing be good for any thing, I am ſure the reality is better; for why does any man diſſemble, or ſeem to be that which he is not, but becauſe he thinks it good to have the qualities he pretends to? for to counterfeit and diſſemble, is to put on the appearance of ſome real excellency. Now the beſt way for a man to ſeem to be any thing, is really to be what he would ſeem to be. Beſides, it is often as troubleſome to ſupport the pretence of a good quality, as to have it; and if a man have it not, it is moſt likely he will be diſcovered to want it, and then all his labour to

ſeem

ſeem to have it is loſt. There is ſomething unnatural in painting, which a ſkilful eye will eaſily diſcern from native beauty and complexion.

It is hard to perſonate and act a part long; for where truth is not at the bottom, nature will always be endeavouring to return, and will betray herſelf at one time or other. Therefore if any man think it convenient to ſeem good, let him be ſo indeed, and then his goodneſs will appear to every one's ſatisfaction; for truth is convincing, and carries its own light and evidence along with it, and will not only commend us to every man's conſcience, but, which is much more, to God, who ſearcheth our hearts. So that upon all accounts ſincerity is true wiſdom. Particularly as to the affairs of this world, integrity hath many advantages over all the artificial modes of diſſimulation and deceit. It is much the plainer and eaſier, much the ſafer and more ſecure way of dealing in the world: it hath leſs of trouble and difficulty, of entanglement and perplexity, of danger and hazard in it: it is the ſhorteſt and neareſt way to our end, carrying us thither in a ſtraight line, and will

will hold out and laſt longeſt. The arts of deceit and cunning continually grow weaker, and leſs effectual and ſerviceable to thoſe that practiſe them; whereas integrity gains ſtrength by uſe, and the more and longer any man practiſeth it, the greater ſervice it does him, by confirming his reputation, and encouraging thoſe with whom he hath to do, to repoſe the greateſt confidence in him, which is an unſpeakable advantage in buſineſs and the affairs of life.

A diſſembler muſt always be upon his guard, and watch himſelf carefully, that he do not contradict his own pretenſions; for he acts an unnatural part, and therefore muſt put a continual force and reſtraint upon himſelf. Whereas he that acts ſincerely hath the eaſieſt taſk in the world; becauſe he follows nature, and ſo is put to no trouble and care about his words and actions; he needs not invent any pretences before-hand, nor make excuſes afterwards, for any thing he hath ſaid or done.

But inſincerity is very troubleſome to manage; a hypocrite hath ſo many things to attend to, as make his life a very perplexed and intricate thing. A liar

liar hath need of a good memory, leſt he contradict at one time what he ſaid at another: but truth is always conſiſtent with itſelf, and needs nothing to help it out; it is always near at hand, and ſits upon our lips: whereas a lie is troubleſome, and needs a great many more to make it good.

Add to all this, that ſincerity is the moſt compendious wiſdom, and an excellent inſtrument for the ſpeedy diſpatch of buſineſs. It creates confidence in thoſe we have to deal with, ſaves the labour of many inquiries, and brings things to an iſſue in few words. It is like travelling in a plain beaten road, which commonly brings a man ſooner to his journey's end, than by-ways, in which men often loſe themſelves. In a word, whatſoever convenience may be thought to be in falſhood and diſſimulation, it is ſoon over; but the inconvenience of it is perpetual, becauſe it brings a man under an everlaſting jealouſy and ſuſpicion, ſo that he is not believed when he ſpeaks truth, nor truſted when perhaps he means honeſtly. When a man hath once forfeited the reputation of his integrity,

integrity, nothing will then ſerve his turn, neither truth nor falſhood.

I have often thought, that God hath in great wiſdom hid from men of falſe and diſhoneſt minds the wonderful advantages of truth and integrity to the proſperity even of our wordly affairs. Theſe men are ſo blinded by their covetouſneſs and ambition, that they cannot look beyond a preſent advantage, nor forbear to ſeize upon it, though by ways ever ſo indirect; they cannot ſee ſo far, as to the remote conſequences of a ſteady integrity, and the vaſt benefits and advantages which it will bring a man at laſt. Were but this ſort of men wiſe and clear-ſighted enough to diſcern this, they would be honeſt out of mere knavery, not out of any love to honeſty and virtue, but with a crafty deſign to promote more effectually their own intereſts; and therefore the juſtice of the divine providence hath hid this trueſt point of wiſdom from their eyes, that bad men might not be upon equal terms with the juſt and upright, and ſerve their own wicked deſigns by honeſt and lawful means.

Indeed,

Indeed, if a man were only to deal in the world for a day, and ſhould never have occaſion to converſe more with mankind, never more need their good opinion, or good word, it were then no great matter (as far as reſpects the affairs of this world) if he ſpent his reputation all at once, and ventured it at one throw. But if he be to continue in the world, and would have the advantage of reputation whilſt he is in it, let him make uſe of truth and ſincerity in all his words and actions, for nothing but this will hold out to the end. All other arts will fail, but truth and integrity will carry a man through, and bear him out to the laſt.

It is the obſervation of Solomon, "The lip of truth is eſtabliſhed for e-"ver: but a lying tongue is but for a "moment." The wiſer any man is, the more clearly will he diſcern, how ſerviceable ſincerity is to all the great ends and purpoſes of human life; and that man hath made a good progreſs, and profited much in the ſchool of wiſdom, who valueth truth and ſincerity according to their worth. Every man will readily grant them to be great virtues,

tues, and arguments of a generous mind; but that there is ſo much of true wiſdom in them, and that they really ſerve to promote our intereſt in this world, ſeems a great paradox to the generality of men: and yet I doubt not but it is undoubtedly true, and generally found to be ſo, in the experience of mankind.

To all that hath been ſaid we muſt add, that hypocriſy and deceit will inevitably expoſe us to the diſpleaſure of Almighty God, and bring upon us the condemnation of the wicked. All our diſſimulation ſhall one day be made manifeſt, and publiſhed on the open theatre of the world, before God, angels, and men, to our everlaſting ſhame and confuſion: all diſguiſes ſhall then be taken off, and every man ſhall appear in his true colours. For "then the ſecrets of men ſhall be "judged, and God will bring every "work into judgment, and every ſecret "thing, whether it be good, or whe-"ther it be evil. Nothing is now co-"vered, which ſhall not then be reveal-"ed, nor hid, which ſhall not then be "known."

Let us therefore be now, what we would be glad to be found in that day, when all

all pretences ſhall be examined, and the cloſeſt hypocriſy of men ſhall be laid open; when the ſecrets of all hearts ſhall be diſcloſed, and all the hidden works of darkneſs ſhall be revealed; when all our thoughts, words and actions ſhall be brought to an equitable trial, and be cenſured by that impartial and infallible judgment of God, which is according to truth.

May we all find mercy of the Lord in that day! Amen.

SERMON

SERMON II.

AGAINST EVIL-SPEAKING.

TIT. iii. 2.

Speak evil of no man.

GENERAL perſuaſives to repentance and a good life, and invectives againſt ſin and wickedneſs at large, are certainly of good uſe to recommend religion and virtue, and to expoſe the deformity and danger of a vicious courſe. But it muſt be acknowledged on the other hand, that theſe general diſcourſes do

do not ſo immediately tend to reform the lives of men: becauſe they do not touch the conſciences of particular perſons in ſo ſenſible and awakening a manner as when we treat of particular duties and ſins, and endeavour to put men upon the practice of the one, and to reclaim them from the other, by proper arguments taken from the word of God, and from the nature of particular virtues and vices.

The general way of preaching is, as if a phyſician, inſtead of applying particular remedies to the diſtemper of his patient, ſhould entertain him with a long diſcourſe of diſeaſes in general, and of the pleaſure and advantages of health; and earneſtly perſuade him to be well, without taking his particular diſeaſe into conſideration, and preſcribing remedies for it.

But if we would effectually reform men, we muſt take a particular notice of the great and common diſorders of their lives, and repreſent their faults to them in ſuch a manner as may convince them of the evil and danger of them, and put them upon endeavouring after a cure.

And

To this end I have pitched upon one of the common and reigning vices of the age, calumny and evil-ſpeaking; by which men contract ſo much guilt to themſelves, and create ſo much trouble to others, and from which, it is to be feared, few or none are wholly free. For "who is he," ſaith the ſon of Sirach, "that hath not offended with his tongue? "In many things," ſaith St. James, "we offend all: and if any man offend "not in word, the ſame is a perfect "man."

But how few have attained to this perfection! And yet unleſs we endeavour after it, and in ſome good meaſure attain it, all our pretenſions to religion are vain: for the ſame apoſtle tells us, "If any "man among you ſeemeth to be religi- "ous, and bridleth not his tongue, but "deceiveth his own heart, that man's "religion is vain."

In ſpeaking upon this ſubject, I ſhall firſt, conſider the nature of the vice forbidden in the text, and the extent of the prohibition, to ſpeak evil of no man: than propoſe ſome conſiderations to illuſtrate the evil of this practice, and diſ-

ſuade men from it; and laſtly, give ſome directions for the prevention or cure of it.

Evil ſpeaking conſiſts in ſaying things of others which tend to their diſparagement and reproach, to the taking away or leſſening of their reputation and good name. And this, whether the things ſaid be true or not. If they be falſe, and we know it, then it is down-right calumny; and if we do not know it, but take it upon the report of others, it is however a ſlander; and ſo much the more injurious becauſe really groundleſs and undeſerved.

If the thing be true, and we know it to be ſo, yet it is a defamation, and tends to the prejudice of our neighbour's reputation: it is contrary to that charity and goodneſs which chriſtianity requires, to divulge the faults of others, though they be really guilty of them, without neceſſity or ſome very good reaſon.

It is evil-ſpeaking and the vice condemned in the text, whether we be the firſt authors of an ill report, or relate it from others; becauſe the man that is evil-

evil-ſpoken of is equally defamed either way.

The caſe is the ſame, whether we ſpeak evil of a man to his face, or behind his back: the former way indeed ſeems to be more generous, but yet it is a great fault, and that which we call reviling; the latter is more mean and baſe, and that which we properly call ſlander or backbiting.

We are moreover, guilty of evil-ſpeaking, whether it be done directly and in expreſs terms, or more obſcurely and by way of oblique inſinuation; whether by direct reproach, or with ſome crafty preface of commendation. For if the effect be defamation, the manner of addreſs doth not much alter the caſe; the one may be more dextrous, but is not at all the leſs faulty: for the deepeſt wounds are often given by theſe ſmoother and more artificial ways of ſlander.

So that in whatever form ſlander appears, if it tend to defame a man, and diminiſh his reputation, it is the vice forbidden in the text.

The prohibition is not, however, to be underſtood abſolutely, as forbidding us to ſay any thing concerning others

that is bad. This in ſome caſes may be neceſſary and our duty, and in ſeveral caſes very fit and reaſonable. The queſtion is, in what caſes, by the general rules of ſcripture and right reaſon, we are warranted to ſay the evil of others that is true.

In general, we are not to do this without good reaſon and neceſſity; as, for the prevention of ſome great evil, or the procuring of ſome conſiderable good to ourſelves, or others. And this I apprehend to be the meaning of that advice of the ſon of Sirach, "Whether it be to "a friend or a foe, talk not of other "mens lives; and if thou canſt without "offence, reveal them not;" that is, if without hurt to any one thou canſt conceal them, divulge them not.

But becauſe this direction may not be thought ſufficient, I ſhall inſtance in ſome of the principal caſes wherein men are warranted to ſpeak evil of others, and in ſo doing do not offend againſt the prohibition in the text.

Now, this is not only lawful, but very commendable, and frequently our duty, in order to the amendment of the perſon of whom evil is ſpoken. In ſuch a caſe

a caſe we may tell a man of his faults privately; or where it may not be ſo fit for us to uſe that freedom, we may reveal his faults to one that is more proper to reprove him, and will probably make no uſe of the diſcovery but to his advantage. And this is ſo far from being a breach of charity, that it is one of the beſt teſtimonies of it. For perhaps the party may not be guilty of what hath been reported of him, and then it is a kindneſs to give him the opportunity of vindicating himſelf: or if he be guilty, perhaps being privately and prudently told of it he may reform. In this caſe the ſon of Sirach adviſeth to reveal mens faults; "admoniſh a friend," ſays he, "it may be he hath not done it; and if "he have, that he do it no more: admoniſh a friend, it may be he hath "not ſaid it; and if he have, that he "ſpeak it not again: admoniſh a friend "for many times it is ſlander; and believe not every tale."

But then we muſt take care that this be done out of kindneſs, and that nothing of our own paſſion be mingled with it; and that under pretence of reproving and reforming them, we do not

reproach and revile them, and tell them of their faults in ſuch a manner as if we did it to ſhew our authority rather than our charity. It requires a mild addreſs and gentle application to manage the buſineſs of reproof, ſo as not to irritate and exaſperate the perſon whom we reprove, inſtead of reforming him.

This likewiſe is not only lawful, but our duty, whom we are legally called to bear witneſs concerning the fault and crime of another. A good man would not be an accuſer, unleſs the public good, or the prevention of ſome great evil ſhould require it. And then the plain reaſon of the thing will ſufficiently juſtify a voluntary accuſation. When a man is called to give teſtimony in this kind, in obedience to the laws, and out of a reverence to the oath taken in ſuch caſes, he is ſo far from deſerving blame for ſo doing, that it would be an unpardonable fault in him to conceal the truth, or any part of it.

Farther; It is lawful to publiſh the faults of others, in our own defence and vindication. When a man cannot conceal anothers faults without betraying his own innocency, no charity requires him

him to ſuffer himſelf to be defamed, to ſave the reputation of another man.

Laſtly; This is lawful for caution and warning to a third perſon, who is in danger of being infected by the company, or ill example of another; or may be greatly prejudiced by repoſing too much confidence in him, having no knowledge or ſuſpicion of his bad qualities. But even in this caſe we ought to take great care that the ill character we give of any man, be ſpread no further than is neceſſary to the good end we deſign by diſcovering it.

Beſides theſe more obvious and remarkable caſes, this prohibition doth not I think hinder but that in ordinary converſation men may mention that ill of others which is already made as public as it well can be: or that one friend may not in freedom ſpeak to another of the miſcarriage of a third perſon, where he is certain no ill uſe will be made of it, and that it will go no further to his prejudice: provided always, that we take no delight in hearing or ſpeaking ill of others. But the leſs we do it, though without any malice, or deſign of harm, ſtill the better; becauſe this ſhews that

we do not feed upon ill reports and take pleaſure in them.

Theſe are the principal caſes in which it may be neceſſary for us to ſpeak evil of other men. And if no man would allow himſelf to ſay any thing to the prejudice of another man's good name, but in theſe and the like caſes, the tongues of men would be very innocent, and the world would be very quiet. But when we paſs theſe limits, we become guilty of a real and heinous offence. As will ſufficiently appear, if we proceed to conſider the *cauſes* and the *conſequences* of this vice.

One of the moſt common cauſes of evil-ſpeaking is ill-nature and cruelty of diſpoſition: and by a general miſtake ill-nature paſſeth for wit, as cunning doth for wiſdom; though in truth they are nothing a-kin to one another, but as far diſtant as vice and virtue.

And there is no greater evidence of the bad temper of mankind, than the general proneneſs of men to this vice.

To ſpeak evil of others, is almoſt become the general entertainment of all companies; and the great and ſerious buſineſs of moſt meetings and viſits, after

ter the neceſſary ceremonies and compliments are over, is to ſit down and and backbite their neighbours. Men generally love rather to hear evil of others than good, and are ſecretly pleaſed with ill reports, receiving them with greedineſs and delight: though at the ſame time they have ſo much juſtice as to hate thoſe that propagate them; and ſo much wit, as to conclude that theſe very perſons will do the ſame for them in another place and company.

But eſpecially, if it concerns one of another party, and that differs from us in matters of religion; in this caſe, all parties ſeem to be agreed that they do God great ſervice in blaſting the reputation of their adverſaries: and though they all pretend to be chriſtians, and the diſciples of him who taught nothing but meekneſs and charity; yet it is ſtrange to ſee with what a ſavage diſpoſition they will ſeize upon one another's reputation, and tear it in pieces. Whatever other ſcruples they may have, they make none to defame one another in the moſt bitter and ſlanderous manner.

Another ſign that ill-nature lies at the root of this vice is, that we eaſily forget the good that is ſaid of others, and ſeldom make mention of it; but the contrary lies uppermoſt in our memories, and is ready to come forth upon all occaſions: and, which is yet more ill-natured and unjuſt, we often relate that to others which we do not believe ourſelves, with this charitable caution, that we hope it is not true, but in the mean time we give it our paſs, and venture it to take its fortune to be believed or not, according to the charity of thoſe into whoſe hands it may come.

A ſecond cauſe of this vice is that men are conſcious of many faults in their own characters, and are willing to think others as faulty as themſelves. When men are bad themſelves they are glad of any opportunity to cenſure others, and are always apt to ſuſpect that evil of other men which they know of themſelves. They cannot have a good opinion of themſelves, and therefore are very unwilling to have ſo of any one elſe; and for this reaſon they endeavour to bring men to a level, hoping it will be ſome juſti-

fication

fication of them, if they can but render others as bad as themſelves.

Another ſource of this vice is malice and revenge. When men are in heat and paſſion, they do not conſider what is true, but what is ſpiteful and miſchievous; and ſpeak evil of others in revenge of ſome injury which they have received from them: being, as it were, blinded by their paſſions, they ſpeak at random, not much caring whether the evil they ſpeak be true or not.

Envy is another cauſe of evil-ſpeaking. Men look with an evil eye upon the good that is in others, and think that their reputation obſcures *them*, and that their commendable qualities ſtand in *their* light; and therefore they do what they can to caſt a cloud over them, that the bright ſhining of others' virtues may not eclipſe their own. This leads them greedily to entertain, and induſtriouſly to publiſh any thing that may ſerve their purpoſe, thereby to raiſe themſelves upon the ruins of other men's reputation.

Another cauſe of evil-ſpeaking is impertinence and curioſity; a fondneſs for talking and meddling in the affairs of other men, which by no means concern

them. Some perſons love to mingle themſelves in all buſineſs, and are loth to ſeem ignorant of ſo important a piece of news as the faults and follies of men, or any bad thing that is talked of in good company. And therefore they with great care pick up ill ſtories, as good matter of diſcourſe in the next company that is worthy of them: and this perhaps not out of any great malice, but for want of ſomething better to talk of, and becauſe their abilities lie chiefly that way.

Laſtly; Men often do this out of wantonneſs, and for diverſion. So little do light and vain men conſider, that a man's reputation is too great and tender a concern to be jeſted with; and that "a ſlanderous tongue "bites like a ſerpent, and wounds like a ſword." For what can be more barbarous, next to ſporting with a man's life, than to play with his honour and reputation, which to ſome men is dearer to them than their lives?

Still farther to expoſe the heinous nature of this vice, let us conſider its conſequences both with reſpect to others, and to ourſelves.

To

To ſpeak evil of another is certainly a great injury, and if the evil which we ſay of them be not true, it is an injury beyond imagination, and beyond all poſſible reparation. Though we ſhould afterwards do our utmoſt endeavour towards their vindication, yet that makes them very little recompenſe; becauſe the vindication ſeldom reacheth ſo far as the reproach, and becauſe commonly men are neither ſo forward to ſpread the vindication, nor is it ſo eaſily received after ill impreſſions are once made. The ſolicitous vindication of a man's ſelf is, at the beſt, but an after-game; and for the moſt part a man had better ſit ſtill than run the hazard of making the matter worſe by playing it.

If we put the caſe in the moſt favourable light, and that the matter of the ſlander is true; yet no man's reputation is conſiderably ſtained, though never ſo undeſervedly, without great harm and damage to him. And it is not unlikely but the matter by paſſing through ſeveral hands will be aggravated beyond the truth, every one out of his bounty adding ſomething to the tale.

But,

But, beſides the injury, it is commonly a very high provocation. And the conſequence of this may be as bad as we can imagine, and may end in dangerous and deſperate quarrels. This reaſon the wiſe ſon of Sirach gives why we ſhould defame no man: "Whether "it be," ſays he," to a friend or a foe, "talk not of other mens lives. For he "hath heard and obſerved thee;" that is, one way or other it will probably come to his knowledge, "and when the time cometh he will ſhew his hatred;" that is, he will take the firſt opportunity to revenge it.

At the beſt, it is always matter of grief to the perſon that is defamed: and chriſtianity, which is the beſt natured inſtitution in the world, forbids us the doing of thoſe things whereby we may grieve one another. A man's good name is a tender thing, and a wound there ſinks deep into the ſpirit even of a wiſe and good man. The more innocent any one is in this reſpect, the more ſenſible is he of this hard uſage; becauſe he never treats others ſo, nor is he conſcious to himſelf that he hath deſerved it.

And

Moreover, the conſequences of this vice are as bad or worſe to ourſelves. He that is wont to ſpeak evil of others, gives a bad character of himſelf, even to thoſe whom he deſires to pleaſe; who, if they be wiſe enough, will conclude that he ſpeaks of them to others, as he ſpeaks of others to them: and were it not for that fond partiality which men have for themſelves, no man could be ſo blind as not to ſee this.

That is well worthy of our conſideration, which our Saviour ſays in this very caſe, "With what meaſure we mete to others, it ſhall be meaſured to us again;" and that frequently "heaped up, and running over." For there is hardly any thing wherein mankind uſe more ſtrict juſtice and equality, than "in rendring evil for evil, and railing for railing."

Nay, revenge often goes further than words. A reproachful and ſlanderous ſpeech hath coſt many a man a duel, and in that the loſs of his own life, or the murder of another, perhaps with the loſs of his own ſoul: and I have often wondered that among chriſtians this matter is not more laid to heart.

And

And though neither of theſe great miſchiefs ſhould happen to us, yet we may ſuffer inconveniences enough many other ways. For no man knows in the chance of things, and the mutability of human affairs, whoſe kindneſs and good-will he may ſtand in need of before he dies. So that did a man only conſult his own ſafety and quiet, he ought to refrain from evil-ſpeaking. "What man is he," ſaith the Pſalmiſt, "that deſireth life, "and loveth many days, that he may "ſee good? Keep thy tongue from evil, "and thy lips from ſpeaking guile."

But there is an infinitely greater danger hanging over us from Almighty God. If we allow ourſelves in this evil practice, all our religion is of no avail. St. Paul puts ſlanderers and revilers amongſt thoſe that "ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God." And our bleſſed Saviour hath told us, "That by our words we ſhall "be juſtified, and by our words we "ſhall be condemned." To which I will add the counſel of the wiſe man, "Refrain your tongue from backbiting, "for there is no word ſo ſecret that ſhall "go for nought, and the mouth that "ſlandereth, ſlayeth the ſoul."

Farther;

Farther to diſſuade us from this vice let us conſider how cheap a kindneſs it is to ſpeak well, at leaſt not to ſpeak ill of any. A good word is an eaſy obligation, but not to ſpeak ill requires only our ſilence, which coſts us nothing. Some inſtances of charity are chargeable, as to relieve the wants and neceſſities of others: the expence deters many from this kind of charity. But were a man ever ſo covetous, he might afford another man his good word; at leaſt, he might refrain from ſpeaking ill of him: eſpecially if it be conſidered how dear many have paid for a ſlanderous and reproachful word.

Let us moreover reflect, that no quality recommends a man more to the favour and good will of others, than to be free from this vice. Every one deſires ſuch a man's friendſhip, and is apt to repoſe confidence in him. Next to piety towards God, and righteouſneſs to men, nothing is thought a more ſignificant commendation of a perſon, than to ſay that he was never, or very rarely heard to ſpeak ill of any. It was a ſingular character given of a certain Roman,

Roman, that " he knew not what it was to give any man an ill word."

Laſtly; When we are tempted to ſpeak evil of others, let us conſider whether we do not lie open to juſt reproach in the ſame, or ſome other reſpect.

There are very few ſo innocent and free either from infirmities or greater faults, as not to be obnoxious to reproach upon ſome account. Even the wiſeſt, the moſt virtuous, and the moſt perfect among men have ſome little vanity or affection, which expoſes them to the railery of a ſatyrical and malicious wit. Therefore we ſhould often turn our thoughts upon ourſelves, and look into that part of the wallet which men moſt commonly caſt over their ſhoulders and keep behind them, that they may not ſee their own faults: and when we have ſearched that well, let us remember our Saviour's rule, " He that is without ſin, let him firſt caſt the ſtone."

I will now conclude with ſome directions for the prevention and cure of this great evil among men.

Firſt; Never ſay any evil of any man, but what you certainly know. Whenever you

you poſitively accuſe and indite any man of a crime, though it be in private and among friends, ſpeak as if you were upon your oath, becauſe God ſees and hears you. This not only charity, but juſtice and a regard to truth demand of us. He that eaſily credits an ill report is almoſt as faulty as the firſt inventor of it. For though you do not make, yet you propagate a lie. Therefore never ſpeak evil of any upon common fame, which for the moſt part is falſe, but almoſt always uncertain whether it be true or not.

Not but that it is a fault, in moſt caſes, to report the evil of men which is true, and which we certainly know to be ſo: but if I cannot prevail to make men wholly abſtain from this fault, I wiſh to compound with ſome perſons, and to gain this point of them at leaſt; becauſe it would retrench a great part of the evil-ſpeaking that is in the world.

Before you ſpeak evil of any man, conſider whether he hath not obliged you by ſome real kindneſs, and then remember it is a bad return to ſpeak ill of him who hath done you good.

Conſider

Conſider likewiſe, whether in the change of human affairs you may not ſome time or other come to ſtand in need of his favour; and how incapable this carriage of yours towards him will render you of it? And whether it may not be in his power to revenge a ſpiteful and needleſs word by a ſhrewd turn? So that if a man made no conſcience of hurting others, yet he ſhould in prudence have ſome attention to himſelf.

Whenever we hear any man evil ſpoken of, if we know any good of him let us mention *that*. It is always the more humane and the more honourable part to ſtand up in the defence and vindication of others, than to accuſe and defame them. Poſſibly the good you may have heard of them may not be true, but it is much more probable that the evil which you have heard of them is not true neither: however, it is better to preſerve the credit of a bad man, than to ſtain the reputation of the innocent. And if there were any need that a man ſhould be evil ſpoken of, it is but fair and equal that his good and bad qualities ſhould be mentioned together; otherwiſe he may be

be ſtrangely miſrepreſented, and an indifferent man may be made a monſter.

They that will obſerve nothing in a wiſe man, but his over-ſights and follies; nothing in a good man, but his failings and infirmities; may poſſibly render a wiſe and good man very deſpicable. If one ſhould heap together all the paſſionate ſpeeches, all the froward and imprudent actions of the beſt man; all that he had ſaid or done amiſs in his whole life, and preſent it all at one view, concealing his wiſdom and virtues; the man in this diſguiſe would look like a mad man or a fury. Yet if his life were fairly repreſented, juſt in the ſame manner it was led; and his many and great virtues ſet over againſt his failings and infirmities, he would appear to all the world to be an admirable and excellent perſon. But how many and great ſoever any man's bad qualities are, it is but juſt, that with all this heavy load of faults he ſhould have the due praiſe of the few real virtues that are in him.

That you may not ſpeak ill of any, do not delight to hear ill of them. Give no countenance to buſy bodies, and thoſe that love to talk of other men's faults;

faults: if you cannot decently reprove them, then divert the diſcourſe ſome other way; or if you cannot do that, by ſeeming not to mind it, you may ſufficiently ſignify that you do not like it.

In the laſt place; Let every man mind himſelf, and his own duty and concerns. Do but endeavour in good earneſt to mend thyſelf, and it will be work enough for one man, and leave thee but little time to talk of others. When Plato withdrew from the court of of Dionyſius, who would fain have had a famous philoſopher for his flatterer, they parted in ſome unkindneſs, and Dionyſius bad him not to ſpeak ill of him when he was returned into Greece; Plato told him, he had no leiſure for it; meaning, he had better things to mind, than to employ his thoughts and diſcourſe upon the faults of ſo bad a man, ſo notoriouſly known to all the world.

Let it not be urged as an apology for this vice, that to obſerve the doctrine of the text would be to give encouragement to bad men, becauſe by this means one great reſtraint from doing evil would be taken away: and that this

this is the moſt proper puniſhment of many faults which the laws of men can take no notice of.

For it doth not ſeem laudable to puniſh one fault by another; beſides, when we have done all we can to correct this vice in ourſelves and others, there will, I fear, be evil-ſpeaking enough in the world to chaſtiſe them that do ill. Though we ſhould hold our peace, there will be bad tongues enough to reproach men for their evil doings: ſo that there is no need at all that good men ſhould be concerned in this odious work. There will always be offenders and malefactors enough to be the executioners to inflict this puniſhment upon one another. Let no man deſpair but that this buſineſs will be ſufficiently done one way or other: I am very much miſtaken, if we may not ſafely truſt an ill-natured world that there will be no failure of juſtice in this kind.

To conclude: the ſin, which I have now warned men againſt is plainly condemned by the word of God; and the duty which I have now been perſuading you to, is eaſy for every man to underſtand, and moſt reaſonable for all men, but

but eſpecially for all chriſtians, to obſerve. It is as eaſy as a reſolute ſilence upon juſt occaſion, as reaſonable as prudence and juſtice and charity, and the preſervation of peace and good-will among men, can make it; and of as neceſſary and indiſpenſable obligation, as the authority of God can render it.

Let us all then adopt the reſolution of David: "I will take heed to my ways, "that I offend not with my tongue." Could we be perſuaded to amend this one fault, we ſhould ſoon be better men in our whole lives. The correcting of this vice, together with thoſe that are nearly allied to it, and may at the ſame time, and almoſt with the ſame reſolution and care be corrected, would make us maſters of many conſiderable virtues, and carry us far towards perfection; it being hardly to be imagined that a man who makes conſcience of his words ſhould not take an equal or a greater care of his actions. And this I take to be both the true meaning, and the true reaſon of that ſaying of St. James, with which I ſhall conclude: "If any man offend not in word, "the ſame is a perfect man."

SERMON

SERMON III.

ON ANGER.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

OUR passions being implanted in us by God, who made nothing in vain, we may be assured that they are designed to serve important purposes, and therefore are not utterly to be extinguished, but to be improved to the various uses for which they are given us. They are all, in their proper places and

duly exercised, not only innocent, but useful. Nay, anger, which seems the harshest of them all, is not evil in itself, but is justified from scripture as well as philosophy; and the apostle in my text, no less than the moralists in their systems, asserts and declares that we may "be angry and not sin."

From which words I shall first shew how far and in what respects this passion of anger is innocent and commendable; and when it exceeds its due boundaries: after which I shall add some motives and directions respecting the regulation of this passion.

That the emotions of anger are natural and necessary, and that at some times and upon some occasions we should do violence to ourselves were we to suppress our resentments, is universally allowed. For outward objects strike the senses, and, as it were, force their different impressions upon the mind, and we can no more forbear shewing our dislike and indignation at the evils we either see or hear, than we can help being affected at the prosperous events which befal us. Anger, no less than the other passions of love, desire, and fear, is implanted in

our

our natures, and muſt exert its power. God is its author, and therefore it neither is nor can be in itſelf evil, or ſimply unlawful.

Nor does nature only dictate, but the judgment of the wiſeſt and beſt of men confirm and juſtify this opinion. There is a tameneſs of ſpirit that deſerves rather our cenſure and reprehenſion, than our eſteem and countenance. To be upon all occaſions paſſive, however by ſome it may be miſcalled courage, argues a real weakneſs of mind. Though it is the wiſdom of a man to paſs by ſome offences, yet it is little better than folly to overlook all. It is a kind of invitation to many to proſecute their malice, and not only to continue, but even to multiply injuries.

Nor is anger only juſtifiable by the voice of reaſon, and the practice of the wiſeſt men, but by revelation too, and the conformity of the beſt and moſt perfect chriſtians. The precepts of the goſpel do by no means tend to extirpate, but only to regulate the paſſions. Our Saviour forbids us to be "angry with our brother without a cauſe;" St. James exhorts us "to be ſlow to wrath," and

St. Paul, "to be angry and ſin not;" all which imply, that it is not the uſe, but the abuſe of this paſſion that is condemned in ſcripture. We know the beſt things may be perverted to the vileſt purpoſes; it is our duty to rectify and diſcreetly manage, not forbear the uſe of them. There are cauſes for which, and times wherein we not only may, but "do well to be angry." We read that Moſes, who had the character of being "the meekeſt man upon the face of the earth," yet was frequently angry. Nay, our Saviour himſelf, who neither did, nor indeed could ſin, beheld not only with grief, but even anger too, the inveterate ſtupidity and obſtinacy of the Jews. And though he patiently bore all revilings, contempts and indignities that were caſt on his perſon; yet when he perceived his father's houſe expoſed and proſtituted to indecency and wickedneſs, his reſentment was raiſed, "he over-"threw their tables, and drove them all "out of the temple."

Hence it manifeſtly appears from the dictates of nature, from the judgment of the wiſeſt men, and from the precepts and practices of the beſt chriſtians, that

at

at proper times, and upon juſt occaſions, anger is allowable.

But this paſſion becomes culpable when it is kindled and inflamed without juſt cauſe.

Though there are ſome occaſions (as we have already proved) which will juſtify our anger, yet it will behove us to be cautious, and not exerciſe this paſſion upon every frivolous pretence and ſlight provocation. To be haſty of ſpirit, and ſoon angry, are by the wiſe man eſteemed manifeſt ſymptoms of *folly*, and tend to evil. There are ſome who will ſhew more heat and choler at a bare ſurmiſe or jealouſy, than others ſhall, or indeed need to do, at the moſt proper ſeaſons, and upon the moſt important accounts. Every diſappointment ſhall ſo fret their turbulent ſpirits, that they ſhall continually be uneaſy to themſelves and others. They have no maſtery over themſelves, but ſuffer their minds to be diſcompoſed, and like the waves of the ſea, to rage and foam at every adverſe gale.

One cannot help lamenting the unhappy condition of thoſe, who for want of ſelf-government, are a perpetual torment to themſelves, daily find-

ing new occaſions of uneaſineſs. They are ruffled and diſquieted at every thing that occurs to them againſt their deſire, or contrary to their expectation. They conſider not the juſt cauſes and objects of their diſpleaſure; nay, thoſe often feel their reſentment moſt, who deſerve it leaſt. How many are there who are exaſperated and incenſed againſt the inſtruments of any miſery or ill accident that befalls them, when they neither did, nor indeed could act with deſign or choice, but merely from neceſſity and compulſion! It were endleſs to enumerate the many ridiculous abſurdities they are liable to, and frequently guilty of, who are of ſuch fiery tempers, and peeviſh diſpoſitions, as upon every trifle or pretence to be wrought up into paſſion.

One of the chief cauſes of reſentment is a difference in opinion or practice. We are often enraged againſt thoſe whom we cannot perſuade to think and act as we do; though we may as ſoon expect to ſee all men of the ſame ſtature and complexion, as in all reſpects to unite and agree in the ſame opinions. When therefore we are exaſperated upon theſe, or any ſuch like occaſions, we are angry

angry without juſt cauſe; and conſequently, not without ſin.

Our anger then likewiſe becomes ſinful when it is directed to a wrong object. Although there are ſuch objects as we may and ought to be incenſed againſt; yet when "the fooliſhneſs of a "man perverteth his way, and his heart "fretteth againſt the Lord," his raſh anger is turned into blaſphemy, and becomes exceedingly ſinful. There are many who complain of the equity of Job's rule, "Shall we receive good from the "hands of the Lord, and ſhall we not "receive evil?" The good they do not deſerve they are willing to receive, but the evil they do deſerve they think it hard to endure.

And as our anger is ſinful, when levelled againſt God; ſo is it when directed at thoſe who at any time deſign, or do us good. This was the Iſraelites crime, when they quarrelled with Moſes, "wherefore haſt thou brought us out of "the land of Egypt, to kill us, our children, and our cattle with thirſt?" This is their ſin, who "cannot endure to hear ſound doctrine," but deſpiſe the inſtruction, and even hate the inſtructor:

who insolently spurn at the command of a parent, the advice of a friend, or the rebukes of a magistrate, and are most angry with those, who in duty and kindness intend them the greatest good. How many are there, whom we must flatter and sooth, or we incur their displeasure; who, like Ahab, hate the prophet, unless he prophesies smoothly, and think those their greatest enemies who have the honesty and courage to tell them the truth! Such resentments as these are most sinful and dangerous, as they discourage others from continuing their good offices, and prevent those very means, whereby alone they might expect benefit: like those unruly patients, who cannot bear the medicines which are designed for their good, and so perish through their obstinacy.

And as anger is criminal when it is causeless or misplaced; so it is always sinful when it is immoderate. Though the cause be ever so just and necessary, the time and place suitable and proper, yet the passion is sinful whenever it exceeds the due bounds and measures. These depend upon various circumstances, and are much easier to be judged of by

by every private person in his own case, than to be determined by particular rules. That degree of heat which upon some occasions would deservedly be esteemed an undue warmth, may yet upon others be not only proper, but commendable and necessary. We must always consider the nature, end, and importance of the subject, nor ever presume to go beyond what that can justify. When we are angry with our brother for any offence against God, his neighbours, or ourselves, we must proportion it to the nature and demerits of his crime. We are not to expostulate, where the transgressions are great, in too gentle a manner, "as Eli did with his sons;" nor, like some over-zealous and unwary persons, whilst we reprehend others for the neglect of their duty, forget our own.

There is no cause whatever, not even religion itself, that can justify excess of passion. They who by violent measures, and with too intemperate a heat pursue its interests, are no true advocates for, and friends to it, but greatly injure the cause they pretend to espouse. And if the best of causes will not excuse immo-

derate anger, much leſs will any thing of an inferior nature; ſo that it is our duty to regulate this paſſion, and keep a ſtrict rein over our hearts, leſt we be tranſported and provoked into indecent extravagances. Anger, like fire, under due government, is ſubſervient to very wiſe and uſeful purpoſes, but when once it obtains the maſtery, we know not what miſchiefs may enſue. Immoderate anger is not only in itſelf ſinful, but is productive of many and great evils; it deprives us at once both of reaſon and temper, and hurries us into extreme folly and madneſs. Hence it is the Pſalmiſt's advice, "Fret not thyſelf, leſt thou be moved to do evil;" let not thy ſpirit be provoked and inflamed, leſt thou "ſpeak unadviſedly with thy lips." Whenever we perceive any dangerous ſymptoms, when the winds blow fiercely, and the ſurges ariſe, we are to take all poſſible care to prevent a ſtorm: we muſt endeavour to ſuppreſs the firſt unruly motions of inordinate anger, leſt it advance by degrees, and grow at length into madneſs.

Nor is our anger only ſinful when it exceeds in its meaſure; but likewiſe, when

when it is of long continuance. Though upon juſt and neceſſary occaſions ſome degrees of anger are lawful and commendable, yet upon no pretence whatever can we juſtify that which is of long duration. Anger may ſometimes enter into the heart and appear in the countenance of the wiſeſt men, but it "reſts only in the boſoms of fools." An angry thought, word, or action even the beſt of men may ſome time or other be liable to, and very eaſily forgiven; but a ſtate of enmity and wrath is utterly inexcuſable. The firſt motions of our paſſion may be natural and neceſſary, conſequently not imputed to our charge as a fault; but if we cheriſh, or ſuffer it to harbour in our breaſts, we incur the puniſhment of malice and revenge.

St. Paul, after the words of my text, "Be ye angry, and ſin not," immediately ſubjoins this remarkable caution, "let not the ſun go down upon your wrath." A heathen philoſopher taught his ſcholars this leſſon, that if any difference aroſe between them in the day, they ſhould peaceably ſhake hands, and be reconciled by the evening. And

ſurely chriſtianity, which teaches us to expect forgiveneſs of our treſpaſſes from God, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us, ſhould oblige us to a conſtant diſpoſition and earneſt deſire of reconciliation and peace. What ſucceſs can we expect from the throne of grace in anſwer to our petitions and prayers, when we ſtudy revenge, and deny that mercy to others which we requeſt for ourſelves? Whilſt we retain theſe ſecret grudges, and malicious heart-burnings, we ſhall "bring a curſe upon our heads "inſtead of a bleſſing: out of our own "mouths we ſhall be condemned, and "our very prayers," as the Pſalmiſt ſays, "ſhall be turned into ſin." So that we muſt have a ſtrict guard over our thoughts and hearts, that we do not harbour reſentments, or ſuffer them to ſettle and abide with us. If at any time they aſſault us, let us treat them as enemies, not welcome them as friends. Let them never get the dominion over us, but let us keep them under ſubjection, as the ruler did his ſoldiers, "who could "ſay to one, go, and he goeth, to ano-"ther, come, and he cometh, to a third, "do this, and he doeth it."

Having

Having conſidered how far this paſſion of anger is innocent and commendable, and in what reſpects it becomes ſinful, namely, when it is cauſeleſs, miſplaced, immoderate, or durable; I ſhall now add a few general directions to regulate this paſſion.

And firſt; Let us conſider the bent and propenſity of our inclinations, and be cautious how at any time we give way to our reſentments. If we find ourſelves through nature or cuſtom warm and vehement in our temper, and eaſy to be provoked, we ſhould endeavour to avoid all tendencies to, all occaſions of paſſion; we ſhould ſuppreſs its firſt emotions, and ſtifle the ſmalleſt ſpark, which otherwiſe might ſpread and grow into a flame. The ſeeds of all miſchief are planted early, and accordingly as they are cheriſhed or neglected they will either ripen or decay. If we unwarily indulge the firſt riſings of any paſſion, it will by degrees gain ground, and we ſhall ſcarcely be able to prevent its deſtructive conſequences. It is then our intereſt and duty to keep a ſtrict rein over our paſſions. It is not ſafe to allow them their free exerciſe, or permit

permit them to make frequent excurſions, leſt in time they abuſe their liberty, and grow predominant. When we find our inclinations give way, and our reſentments too eaſily and powerfully beſet us, we muſt ſummon all our force, exert our utmoſt ſkill, and not ceaſe, till we have gained the victory. If we come to a parley, and grant them preſent allowances with a deſign of reſtraining and governing them for the future, they will ſoon triumph and prevail, and lead us captive at their wills.

Secondly; Let us frequently conſider the great deformity, folly, guilt and danger of immoderate anger. It tyranniſes over the mind, and abſolutely deprives the man both of his reaſon and ſenſes. It obſtructs all his faculties, ſo that he has no ears to hear, no judgment to diſtinguiſh the evil from the good, nor will he chuſe the one, and refuſe the other. It diſorders his ſpirits, and diſtorts his countenance, making him act like a lunatic, and look like a monſter. It makes him capable of ſuch ridiculous follies and abſurdities, as upon ſerious reflec-

reflection, and in his cool ſenſes he would bluſh to own. It unmans and degrades his nature, and inſtead of being only "a little lower than the angels," even levels him with the brutes. It proſtitutes his character, diſgraces his profeſſion, and incapacitates him even for private, much more for public employments. It may betray him into the moſt horrid offences both againſt God and his neighbour; leading him to utter ſenſeleſs imprecations and profane oaths, or unjuſt ſlander and detraction. In a word, it expoſes both his body and ſoul to extreme hazard, deforming and diſordering the former, diſcompoſing, debaſing and betraying the latter.

To reflect ſeriouſly how "the furious man aboundeth with tranſgreſſion," cannot but excite us carefully to avoid his fate. The fear of contracting ſo much guilt, and incurring ſuch great evils, ſhould make us ſhun all occaſions, all approaches to it. No pretended punctilio of honour, no verbal affront, nor the greateſt injury that can poſſibly be offered, ſhould ever raiſe our paſſions and reſentments ſo high, as to put us upon the raſh

raſh and deſperate adventure of wrecking at once all our preſent and our future happineſs. The wiſe man obſerves, that "he who is ſlow to anger is better "than the mighty, and he who ruleth "his ſpirit than he that taketh a city;" and though faſhion and cuſtom may unhappily have depraved the notions of ſome, yet in the general eſteem of the wiſe and virtuous, it will always be more glorious and honourable, as well as more religious and chriſtian to ſuppreſs and conquer, than give way to our reſentments. So that if we are wiſe for ourſelves, have any regard to our peace, any love for our lives, or any value for our ſouls, we ſhall continually ſtrive to avoid immoderate anger, which is deſtructive of them all.

To conclude; Let us beſeech Almighty God, in whoſe hands are our hearts and paſſions, ſo to direct, diſpoſe and govern them as may beſt ſerve the ends of his glory, and our own eternal happineſs; and more eſpecially that we may always exerciſe the paſſion of anger upon proper objects, in a juſt cauſe, and at proper times and places; and that we may never be provoked

provoked to immoderate resentment, nor "at any time" suffer the sun to go down upon our wrath.

Thus shall we obey the apostle's rule, enjoy the peace and comfort of it here, and the reward of it hereafter.

SERMON

SERMON IV.

THE TENDENCY OF VIRTUE TO PROLONG LIFE.

PROVERBS ix. 10, 11.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom; and the knowledge of the holy is underſtanding; for by me thy days ſhall be multiplied, and the years of thy life ſhall be increaſed.

THERE is no deſire which God hath ſo deeply fixed and implanted in our nature, as that of preſerving and prolonging our life. Life and health are

are the foundation of all other enjoyments; and are therefore of greater value than all other poſſeſſions put together, becauſe they are neceſſary in order to the enjoyment of thoſe poſſeſſions; and without theſe, all other things that are the objects of men's hopes and deſires in the world, have with regard to us, no being, no exiſtence. "For, what ſhall "it profit a man, if he gain the whole "world, and loſe his own life? Or "what ſhall a man give in exchange for "his life?" The principal point of wiſdom therefore in the conduct of human life, is ſo to uſe the enjoyments of this preſent world, as that they may not themſelves ſhorten that period, wherein it is allowed us to enjoy them. And if any part of knowledge deſerves a ſteadier attention than the reſt, and has of all others the juſteſt claim to be eſteemed invaluable; it is unqueſtionably *that* knowledge, by which, as the wiſe man here expreſſes it, our "days may be "multiplied, and the years of our life "may be increaſed."

"Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die," was the reaſoning of the epicure mentioned by St. Paul. But it was very falſe

falſe reaſoning, to make the melancholy conſideration of the ſhortneſs of life an argument for debauchery, when that very debauchery is the cauſe of making mens lives ſtill ſhorter. Temperance and ſobriety, the regular government of our appetites and paſſions, the promoting peace and good order in the world, are, even without regard to any arguments of religion, the greateſt inſtances of human wiſdom; becauſe they are the moſt effectual means of preſerving our being, and well-being in the world; of prolonging the period, and enlarging the enjoyments of life. Religion has added ſtrength to theſe conſiderations; and, by annexing the promiſe of God's immediate bleſſing to the natural tendency and conſequences of things, has made the wiſdom of chuſing virtue infinitely more conſpicuous; and the folly of vice more apparently abſurd.

"The fear of the Lord is the begin-
"ning of wiſdom, and the knowledge of
"the holy is underſtanding; for by me
"thy days ſhall be multiplied, and the
"years of thy life ſhall be increaſed."

Theſe words in the firſt place ſuggeſt this univerſal propoſition, that the practice

tice of religion is in general man's trueſt wiſdom: "the fear of the Lord is the "beginning of wiſdom, and the know-"ledge of the holy is underſtanding." And here, the whole tenor of ſcripture, in conjunction with the reaſon of things, concurs to teach us the wiſdom of being virtuous and religious. The books of Solomon eſpecially, whoſe human judgment was ſuperior to all others, even ſeparate from his knowledge in things divine, are ſo full of this ſentiment, that, throughout all his writings, the words ſeem never to be uſed in any other ſignification, but wiſdom is always put for true virtue and piety, and folly or madneſs for the habit of ſin. As if there were no other folly in the world, but that of wickedneſs; nor any true wiſdom, but that of religion; becauſe, in the comparative ſenſe, no other things ſo eminently deſerve theſe names. And indeed, if wiſdom conſiſts in ſtudying thoſe things, which are of the greateſt uſe and neceſſity for us to know; if it be wiſe to employ our thoughts about things in their own nature the moſt excellent, and, in their relation to us, of the utmoſt importance; if it be wiſe to purſue

purſue the nobleſt ends, and in the purſuit thereof to uſe the beſt and propereſt means; if it be wiſe to conſult our own real happineſs, and to be more concerned for the improvement of our minds in practical knowledge, than for amuſing them with vain and empty ſpeculations; if eternity be of more importance than time, and a never-ceaſing duration than a tranſitory moment: if the favour of God be infinitely more valuable than the friendſhip of the world; and it be more adviſeable to pleaſe an Almighty Benefactor, than mortal men whoſe breath is in their noſtrils; if joy and ſatisfaction of mind be more deſireable, than endleſs anxiety, horror and deſpair; if peace and love, charity and univerſal good-will, be more eligible than war, confuſion and deſolation; if it be wiſer to promote the happineſs of the world, than that men ſhould make each other miſerable without cauſe and without end; in a word, if wiſdom conſiſts in knowing and diſtinguiſhing, in chuſing and in adhering to "whatſoever things are true, "honeſt, juſt, pure, lovely, and of good "report;" things that promote the health of our bodies, and ſecure the peace and quiet

quiet of our minds; things that eſtabliſh the order of the world, and make other men happy as well as ourſelves; things that make our preſent enjoyments eaſy, the remembrance of what is paſt comfortable, and the hopes and expectations of what is to come ſecure; if the chuſing theſe things be the part of a wiſe man, then is religion evidently man's trueſt wiſdom. For where are theſe things to be found, but in the practice of virtue and true religion?

There is a wiſdom in the underſtanding of arts and ſciences, which are beneficial to mankind in this preſent ſtate. But this is a wiſdom confined to particular perſons, and its uſefulneſs limited to a very ſhort duration. There is a wiſdom, which men place in being able to overreach and defraud each other, conſiſting in the "ſkill and cunning craftineſs of "them that lie in wait to deceive:" but this is a wiſdom falſely ſo called; and the end of it appears always to be the extremeſt folly. There is a wiſdom belonging to thoſe who by political ſkill manage ſecretly the great affairs of the world, and by deep counſels bring about unexpect-

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ed changes in the ſtates and kingdoms of the earth: but this wiſdom is often a great ſnare, and a dangerous temptation to men's virtue; giving extraordinary opportunities indeed to the brighter virtues of ſome very few heroic ſpirits, to ſhine forth illuſtriouſly, to the glory of religion in ſingular acts of moderation and juſtice, of piety and goodneſs, for the public peace and ſecurity of mankind; but much more uſually joined with great wickedneſs, and ſeldom mentioned in ſcripture, but with the marks of an evil or ſuſpicious character. There is a wiſdom in words, and artful repreſentations of things; called by St. Paul "the enticing words of man's wiſdom:" but this alſo in ſcripture is always ſpoken of with an ill character; being that philoſophy and vain deceit, that art of confounding truth and falſhood, which St. Paul warns us againſt; and which vain pretence to wiſdom, God choſe the weak things of the world, the plain unaffected ſimplicity of the doctrine of the goſpel, on purpoſe to confound. Laſtly, there is a wiſdom in ſearching out the ſecrets of nature, and underſtanding the

variety of the works of God: and this indeed, ſo far as it is practical, and leads to the knowledge of the author of nature, is an excellent wiſdom, and worthy of great commendation: but where it is merely ſpeculative, it is of more difficulty than uſe, and lies level to the capacity of but few men's underſtandings. The only wiſdom, that all men are capable of, and that all men are indiſpenſably obliged to attain, is the practical wiſdom of being truly religious; the wiſdom of underſtanding, and of ſteadily purſuing, their own true temporal and eternal intereſt. The compariſon between ſpeculative and practical wiſdom, is moſt elegantly deſcribed by Job: "Surely," ſays he, "there is a vein for "the ſilver, and a place for gold where "they fine it. There is a path which "no fowl knoweth, and which the vul"ture's eye has not ſeen; the lion's "whelps have not trodden it, nor the "fierce lion paſſed by it. But where "ſhall wiſdom be found, and where is "the place of underſtanding? Man "knoweth not the price thereof, neither "is it found in the land of the living; "the depth ſaith, it is not in me; and "the

" the ſea ſaith, it is not with me;
" it cannot be gotten for gold, nei-
" ther ſhall ſilver be weighed for the
" price thereof. Whence then cometh
" wiſdom? and where is the place
" of underſtanding?" The reply fol-
lows; " God, underſtandeth the way
" thereof, and he knoweth the place
" thereof; for he looketh to the ends
" of the earth, and ſeeth under the
" whole heaven. But unto man he
" ſaid; behold the fear of the Lord,
" that is wiſdom, and to depart from
" evil, that is underſtanding." His meaning is; the ſecrets of nature, God only knoweth perfectly; but the knowledge of religion is the proper wiſdom of man. " The ſecret things belong unto
" the Lord our God; but the things
" that are revealed, belong unto us and
" to our children for ever; that we may
" do all the words of the law." This is very affectionately expreſſed likewiſe by Moſes, in his exhortation to the Iſraelites; " Behold, I have taught you ſtatutes
" and judgments, even as the Lord my
" God commanded me; keep therefore
" and do them; for this is your wiſdom
" and underſtanding in the ſight of the

" nations." This is that which alone can make men truly great, truly admirable and praiſe-worthy; " The fear of " the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom; " a good underſtanding have all they " that do his commandments; the praiſe " thereof endureth forever." I conclude this head, that " the practice of religion is" in general " man's trueſt wiſdom," with the excellent words of the wiſe author of the book of Eccleſiaſticus, " To fear the " Lord is the beginning of wiſdom; and " it was created with the faithful in the " womb: to fear the Lord is the fulneſs " of wiſdom, and filleth men with her " fruits; if thou deſire wiſdom, keep " the commandments, and the Lord " ſhall give her unto thee; for the fear " of the Lord is wiſdom and inſtruction, " and faith and meekneſs are his de- " light."

Secondly; The practice of religion, as it is man's trueſt wiſdom in general, ſo in particular the text aſſures us it is wiſe in this reſpect, that it tends to prolong our life and lengthen our days: " the fear of the Lord, is the beginning " of wiſdom; and the knowledge of the " holy, is underſtanding; for by me thy " days

" days ſhall be multiplied, and the years " of thy life ſhall be increaſed." There is nothing in the Old Teſtament more frequent, than promiſes of health and long life, to them that live in obedience to the commands of God. In the delivery of the law, God himſelf annexeth to the fifth commandment, a promiſe that the days of thoſe that obſerved it, ſhould " be long in the land which the Lord their God had given them :" and St. Paul takes notice of it as the firſt, and indeed the only commandment with an expreſs and particular promiſe annexed. Solomon, in his book of Proverbs, among a great variety of arguments to perſuade men to the practice of virtue, always mentions length of days, as a principal motive propoſed by God in the perſon of wiſdom; " My ſon, forget " not my law, but let thine heart keep " my commandments; for length of " days, and long life, and peace ſhall " they add unto thee; they ſhall be " life unto thy ſoul. Happy is the man " that findeth wiſdom, and the man that " getteth underſtanding; for length of " days are in her right hand, and in her

" left hand riches and honour." And the Pſalmiſt in his exhortation to obedience, quoted by St. Peter in his firſt epiſtle ſays, " Come ye children, hearken " unto me, I will teach you the fear of " the Lord; what man is he that deſireth " life, and loveth many days, that he may " ſee good? Keep thy tongue from evil, " and thy lips that they ſpeak no guile; " depart from evil, and do good."

On the contrary, among the various threatnings denounced in the Old Teſtament againſt ſinners, it is very uſual to make this declaration, that their days ſhall be ſhortened. " The fear " of the Lord prolongeth days; but " the years of the wicked ſhall be ſhorten- " ed. Let not him that is deceived, truſt in " vanity; for vanity ſhall be his recom- " penſe. It ſhall be accompliſhed before " his time, and his branch ſhall not be " green. He ſhall ſhake off his unripe " grape as the vine, and ſhall caſt off " his flower as the olive." The application of which obſervation is made by the wiſe man, " Be not overmuch wicked, " neither be thou fooliſh; why ſhouldeſt " thou die before thy time?"

And there is ſomething in the nature of

of things, that tends to verify this doctrine; Men deſtroy themſelves and ſhorten their days by many kinds of wickedneſs: by wars and deſolations they depopulate whole countries; by private quarrels they bring each other to an untimely end; by capital crimes they bring themſelves to be cut off by the hand of juſtice; by luxury and intemperance they deſtroy their bodies; the riotous and unclean perſon going (as Solomon very elegantly expreſſes it) "as an ox goeth to the ſlaughter, or as "a fool to the correction of the ſtocks; "till a dart ſtrike through his liver; as "a bird haſteth to the ſnare, and know-"eth not that it is for his life." By envy and malice they conſume themſelves, and pine away in the midſt of their iniquity. This alſo is well expreſſed by Solomon, "A ſound heart is the life of "the fleſh, but envy is the rottenneſs of "the bones." Laſtly, by the terrors of their own minds are they waſted, and preyed upon by the worm of conſcience, till they are conſumed. "When thou "with rebukes doſt chaſten man for ſin, "thou makeſt his beauty to conſume "away, like as it were a moth fretting

"a garment." In like manner on the other hand, according to the ſame natural tendency of things, by peace and charity are men preſerved from deſtruction; by temperance are their bodies maintained in health; by quiet of conſcience and ſatisfaction of mind, is new life added to their ſpirits. "Fear "the Lord, and depart from evil; it "ſhall be health to thy navel, and mar-"row to thy bones." Which ſentiment on is ſtill more fully expreſſed by the author of the book of Eccleſiaſticus. "The "fear of the Lord is honour, and glory, "and gladneſs, and a crown of rejoic-"ing; the fear of the Lord maketh a "merry heart, and giveth joy and glad-"neſs, and a long life; the root of wiſ-"dom is to fear the Lord, and the branch-"es thereof are long life."

But it may perhaps be enquired how far this bleſſing of long life, promiſed to obedience under the Old Teſtament, is proper to be deſired by chriſtians. And here it is certain, the goſpel gives us ſo mean a notion of the preſent life, and ſo glorious a repreſentation of that to come; that no man who firmly believes the ſcriptures,

tures, and has lived ſo religiouſly as to have ſecured to himſelf a good foundation againſt the time to come, but muſt ſometimes wiſh when he ſeriouſly meditates upon theſe things, to be "delivered "from the miſeries of this ſinful world, "and to be preſent with the Lord, which "is far better." But alas! there are few, extremely few, whoſe lives have either been ſo innocent, or their repentance and amendment ſo complete, as not to have reaſon to wiſh for more years, wherein to root out more perfectly their former ill habits, or to improve the good diſpoſitions they have already in ſome meaſure attained. And it were well, if even years and experience could, in theſe latter ages of the world, produce the ſame effect, which the belief of the goſpel, in the primitive and pureſt times, accompliſhed frequently as it were in a moment. But if the generality of chriſtians were ſo perfect, as not to need to deſire longer ſpace of time for their own amendment and improvement; yet at leaſt for the ſake of others, with whom they are concerned either in private friendſhips, or in natural relation, or in public affairs,

it is reasonable men should desire for themselves, and others for them, the blessing of length of days. "For none "of us liveth to himself, and no man "dieth to himself;" and St. Paul though for his own part he desired rather to "be present with the Lord," yet, because for him to live was Christ, that is, was needful for the propagation of the gospel, and more beneficial to the persons, he had converted; therefore he desired rather to continue with them; and this he calls the "fruit of his labour." Further; since God has placed us in this world, for the ends and purposes of his all-wise providence, and we know not beforehand what duties he intends to call us to, and since he has implanted in us a natural and necessary desire of life, in order to accomplish his wise designs in the government of the world; it is therefore natural and reasonable for us to look upon length of days as a blessing; and "the hoary head is a crown of glory, if "it be found in the way of righteous-"ness." But when any person through discontent, desires not to continue in the world, nor to fulfil that duty which God has appointed him here, it is like desiring

firing that he had never come into it; which is murmuring and finding fault with the creation of God, and repining at him for making us such creatures as he has been pleased to make us. However, the longest life here, is but a moment in comparison of eternity; and the greatest length of days, is then only really a blessing, as I before observed, when it is an anticipation of a happy eternity, of God's "giving us indeed a long life, even life everlasting." We ought therefore to make it the main care of our lives, to secure our eternal happiness hereafter; and then length of days here will be a blessing, not only upon its own account, but much more so upon account of its affording us an opportunity of preparing our selves by still greater care and watchfulness, and continual improvement in the practice of all virtues, for a more perfect and complete degree of happiness in the life to come. If this be not done, length of days will, like all other blessings, be turned into a curse; and become only a stronger evidence against us, of our incorrigible impenitency. If we be not "so taught to number our

" days, as to apply our hearts unto wiſ-
" dom;" if, as our years paſs on, we think not more and more ſeriouſly on our preparation for eternity: but defer our repentance from day to day, and put off our deſign of being religious from one year to another; it will profit us nothing, nay, on the contrary, it will be a great aggravation of our miſery, that " our days have been multiplied, " and that the years of our life have " been increaſed. For, when all theſe " things are paſſed away as a ſhadow, " and as a poſt that haſteth by;" (which is the caſe even of the longeſt life here upon earth) then ſudden, and ſo much heavier deſtruction will come upon us unawares, even as pain upon a woman in travail, and we ſhall not eſcape. Then the expectations of the delaying ſinner ſhall appear " thin as the ſpi-
" der's web; and his hope as the chaff, " which the wind ſcattereth away from " the face of the earth." Then they who ſpend their days in riot and debauchery, and ſay " to morrow ſhall be as " this day and much more abundant," ſhall have their ſouls required of them in a mo-

a moment. "The Lord of that ſervant who ſays in his heart, my Lord "delayeth his coming, will come in "a day when he looketh not for him, "and at an hour when he is not aware, "and will cut him in ſunder, and will "appoint him his portion with the unbe-"lievers;" and how much ſoever the maſter may have delayed, how long ſoever that wicked ſervant's life may have been, yet his deſtruction, when it comes, will ſurpriſe him unprovided as in a moment. But he, on the other hand, who in a ſhort life makes ſpeedy proviſion for eternity; though he be cut off by an early death, yet, "being made perfect in a ſhort time, he "fulfilleth a long time;" as the ſon of Sirach excellently expreſſes it, "For ho-"nourable age is not that which ſtandeth "in length of time, nor that is meaſured "by number of years; but wiſdom is "the grey hair unto men, and an un-"ſpotted life is old age."

SERMON

SERMON V.

ON VERACITY.

EPHESIANS iv. 25.

Wherefore putting away lying, ſpeak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another.

VERACITY, or a regard to truth, was a duty peculiarly fit to be inculcated upon converts from paganiſm; not only as lying, among other evil practices, was common and cuſtomary every where

where among them; but as ſome of their moſt celebrated maſters of wiſdom taught looſer principles upon this head, than upon many other ſubjects of morality. They eſteemed lying in many caſes to be lawful and juſtifiable. It was therefore very ſuitable, that when the apoſtle put the Epheſians in mind of the better inſtructions they had learned from "the truth as it is in Jeſus," or from the chriſtian revelation, which eminently bears the character of the doctrine of truth; he ſhould begin with urging them to a ſtricter regard to truth, than they had either practiſed or been taught before their converſion. And this he does in the words of the text.

I ſhall, in this diſcourſe, firſt explain the precept here recommended to chriſtians, or the duty which is preſcribed by theſe words; and then conſider the reaſon which the apoſtle gives for it.

Truth, or veracity, as it is a moral virtue, denotes the agreement of our words with our own ſenſe and apprehenſion: and lying, properly ſpeaking, ſtands oppoſed to truth only in this ſignification. A man may ſpeak the truth to his neigh-

neighbour in this moral ſenſe, and in the ſenſe of the text, even when he is involuntarily miſtaken: and on the other hand he may be guilty of the ſin of lying, when he ſpeaks to his neighbour that which is real truth in itſelf, as long as he does not think it ſo.

Speaking, and writing which is but another way of ſpeaking, are intended to be means of communicating our minds one to another. Lying is giving a falſe repreſentation of our minds; ſpeaking what we think to be falſe, to deceive others.

Both of theſe are to be taken in, for explaining this vice; that the matter of what we ſay is falſe, or different from what we believe to be true; and that it be ſpoken with intention to deceive him to whom we ſpeak.

There may be *either* ſeparately, without incurring the guilt of lying. It is not a lie, for inſtance, to repeat a known falſhood in the way of a narrative, as long as a man mentions it not as his own ſenſe, but declares that he believes it to be falſe. Nor is it repugnant to veracity to uſe figurative expreſſions, which yet are not ſtrictly true in the literal

teral ſenſe; as long as by common uſe or the manner of ſpeaking them, the deſign of them is eaſy to be underſtood. As in the uſe of an hyperbole; or, when we exceed what is ſtrictly true, in magnifying or diminiſhing a thing, every one at the ſame time may underſtand that it is intended for no more than a figure. So the evangeliſt ſays, "There are many other things which "Jeſus did, the which, if they ſhould "be written every one, I ſuppoſe that "even the world itſelf could not contain "the books that ſhould be written." Which none can underſtand to import any more, than that the books which muſt be written upon ſuch a ſubject would be endleſs. So the uſe of an ironical way of ſpeaking, is not inconſiſtent with veracity: that is, when the ſtrict literal ſenſe of the words ſeems to ſignify one thing, but the circumſtances of the caſe plainly ſhew that the quite contrary is meant. As in Elijah's conteſt with the falſe prophets of Baal, when they had offered their ſacrifice, and called upon their falſe god from morning till noon to ſend fire down to conſume the ſacrifice, Elijah did not think it unlawful

lawful or unbecoming to deride them and their god, that he might awaken them out of their ſtupidity, and ſhew their folly to all the people, by an irony. "Cry aloud," ſays he, "for he is a "god; either he is talking, or he is "purſuing, or he is in a journey, or per- "adventure he ſleepeth, and muſt be "awaked." Here was no violation of truth, in ſaying, in the manner and on the occaſion that he ſaid it, that Baal was a god. Every one that heard him, muſt underſtand him to mean the contrary.

Nor is an intention to deceive others always criminal, if no falſhood be ſpoken for that purpoſe. It is not unlawful to deceive an enemy in war by a ſtratagem, though it would be ſo to aſſert a falſhood to him. I may foreſee that my ſilence, or forbearing to ſay all that I know of a matter, will lead my neighbour into a miſtake; and yet may lawfully forbear to inform him of the truth; yea, in ſome caſes it may be our duty not to do it.

But to affirm any falſhood in order to deceive others, is never juſtifiable. It is not lawful to lie for God, or for the greateſt advantage that can be propoſed by

by it to our neighbours, or to ourſelves. A miſchievous lie, that is deſigned to the prejudice of any, is more heinous and aggravated upon other accounts, than an officious lie or a lie in jeſt: but lying in any kind is a violation of truth, which the beſt end propoſed by it cannot juſtify.

More particulary, the exhortation of the text ſhould be obſerved in common converſation, in bearing teſtimony, and in making and performing promiſes.

Truth is to be obſerved in common converſation. People have more eſpecial need in ſome reſpects to be admoniſhed of their obligations inviolably to maintain truth here: for many are more ready to allow themſelves to tranſgreſs in what they call trivial inſtances than upon ſolemn occaſions: and yet by ſuch beginnings a way is opened in proceſs of time for the diſregard of truth in the moſt conſiderable matters. As men often proceed gradually from a cuſtomary breach of their word, to break their oaths too at length; ſo when once a ſtrict regard to truth upon common occaſions is loſt, it ſeldom remains long unſhaken in caſes of greater importance. The ſcriptures,

and,

and, as we ſhall ſee preſently, the reaſon of things alſo, oblige us to maintain truth inviolably and univerſally, without indulging ourſelves in any ſort of known falſhood. The prohibition of lying both in the old and new Teſtament is abſolute. "Ye ſhall not lie one to another. "Lie not one to another." And ſo is the injunction of truth. "Speak every "man truth to his neighbour. What- "ſoever things are true, think on theſe "things." Such declarations of the mind of God leave us no licenſe to make free with truth on the ſlighteſt occaſions.

How common ſoever therefore the practice may be, we ſhould not think ourſelves at liberty to make profeſſions of kindneſs, where none at all is meant. Civility is one thing, and fit to be profeſſed and practiſed to all; but profeſſion of diſtinguiſhing reſpect and eſteem is another thing; and when there is nothing really intended by it, is inconſiſtent with the candor and ſimplicity which ſhould be found in a chriſtian.

Truth ſhould alſo be maintained in bearing teſtimony. Many, who make no account of violating truth in common converſation where they apprehend

hend none to be injured; yet cannot allow themſelves to bear falſe witneſs, where they think their neighbour directly concerned, in his life, or property, or reputation, or other valuable intereſts. "A falſe witneſs that ſpeaketh lies, and "ſo ſoweth diſcord among brethren," may be an opprobrious name to ſome who have not ſuch an univerſal regard to truth as they ſhould have, becauſe of the obvious miſchief which accrues to ſociety from a falſe witneſs. But I fear ſome will incur this guilt in God's account, who eſteem themſelves clear of it.

A conſcientious regard to truth will engage us to be very careful, that we ſpread nothing to the leſſening or reproach of our neighbour, of which we have not good aſſurance; that we publiſh not a defamation upon hear-ſay, nor take up without ſufficient grounds a report againſt our neighbour. Reports which we divulge, carry the authority of our names to ſupport them; and if we haſtily put an uncertain ſtory we have heard out of our power by making it public, we may prove the falſe witneſſes of a ſcandal

ſcandal to many, who take it up upon our authority, without having either inclination or opportunity to examine the grounds upon which we proceeded.

If we are called to give public teſtimony between man and man, a ſincere reſpect to truth will engage us to a careful recollection, before we give our teſtimony, what we can ſay upon the matter. It will diſpoſe us to lay aſide affection on one hand, and prejudice on the other; impartially to relate the true ſtate of things, as far as we can bear witneſs to them; and faithfully to repreſent facts, as they come within our notice.

Here we ſhould think ourſelves obliged not only to ſpeak nothing but the truth, but to ſpeak the whole truth, without concealment or diſguiſe. Though we are not bound in every caſe to ſpeak the whole truth; yet certainly when a matter depends either wholly or in part upon our evidence, and we come in as witneſſes, we are bound not only to avoid all direct falſhood, but alſo not to omit any thing we can diſcover, which may caſt light upon the true merits of the

the cauſe. Truth ought to be ſacred to an honeſt man, when he is only heard upon his word, as well as when he is ſworn to "ſpeak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." If a matter ſhould be wrong taken by a partial repreſentation, and ſo a wrong judgment paſſed in a cauſe; though we ſhould have ſaid nothing untrue as far as we went, yet ſhall we be juſtly accounted acceſſary to that wrong judgment, by concealing what we had farther to offer. And thus partial evidence will have all the ſame evil effects, which evidence directly falſe can have.

Moreover, truth muſt be exerciſed in our promiſes and engagements. And veracity requires two things in relation to them.

Firſt, That we really intend to perform them, when they are made. In matters where we were at full liberty before, promiſes lay us under obligation, and give our neighbour a right; therefore we ſhould never allow ourſelves to make them, unleſs there be an intention to make them good. A good man is careful to ſpeak the truth in his heart: he ſpeaks according to his true meaning and deſign. To engage to do a thing, when at the

the time of the engagement we foreſee that we cannot accompliſh it, or have it not in our intention, is really to injure and impoſe upon our neighbour, and to wrong our own ſouls. We ſhould not therefore be raſh in making promiſes, but weigh beforehand the lawfulneſs, the practicability, the expedience of what we undertake; for the ſame thing which Solomon ſays of vows to God, will hold true of promiſes to men. "Bet-"ter it is that thou ſhouldeſt not vow, "than that thou ſhouldeſt vow and not "pay."

We ſhould likewiſe be careful to perform our promiſes after they are made. This is as eſſential to veracity as the former.

Not but that there are ſome caſes, which may ſuperſede our obligation. If we are afterwards unexpectedly diſabled from fulfilling them by providence, God and conſcience, and all reaſonable men, will diſcharge us from the guilt of falſhood in not making our word good. We could only be ſuppoſed to promiſe, if we were able. Or if we ſhould be convinced, that the matter of our promiſe is unlawful; we muſt repent of our raſh-

neſs in making it, and not add ſin to ſin by executing it. Herod ought with repentance to have broken even his oath, rather than have done ſo cruel and injurious a thing in conſequence of it, as beheading John the Baptiſt, if really that was included in his oath: indeed he might more juſtly have given that wicked woman, who ſolicited it, the half of his kingdom, according to the letter of his promiſe than the baptiſt's head. And if unforeſeen ſuperior engagements require our attendance, at the time when a promiſe was to be performed, they muſt take place of it. For no promiſe can be made excluſive of all future contingencies, nor can releaſe a man from that which the providence of God makes much more immediately his duty.

But veracity obliges us to performance, when we lawfully may do it, when we are in a capacity, and not called from it by much more evident duty. A lover of truth will not ſatisfy himſelf to have given his word, to be rid of preſent importunity, or to pleaſe his neighbour for the time, without any concern about the matter afterwards. Though the performance, in the event ſhould prove a

conſiderable damage to himſelf, and a diſadvantageous bargain, yet he will not be a covenant-breaker. "He ſweareth "to his own hurt, and changeth not." If he is not able at preſent to make good his engagements, yet he will bear them in mind, and make conſcience of performing them whenever it ſhall be in his power, though he ſhould be under no obligation by human laws to do it.

Let us, ſecondly, conſider the reaſon which the apoſtle gives for inviolably maintaining the truth: "becauſe we are members one of another." Which may be underſtood either as applicable to mankind in common, or to chriſtians in particular.

This argument is applicable, firſt, to mankind in general. We are members one of another, as we partake of the ſame human nature, and in that reſpect are upon a level: we are members of ſociety in common; entitled to the ſame rights, claims, and expectations one from another as men; and are mutually helpful and ſubſervient, as the members of the body are to each other: and the principal link that holds us together, is mu-

tual confidence, founded upon the hope of common fidelity.

Now lying makes void and uſeleſs the great inſtrument of ſociety, the faculty of ſpeech or writing. The power of ſpeech was given us by our creator, and the art of writing ſince found out, on purpoſe that we might be able ſo to convey our ſenſe to others, that they may diſcern it as plainly as if they were acquainted with what paſſes in our minds. But as far as the inward ſenſe of our minds, when we profeſs to give it, is not faithfully conveyed; ſo far theſe means of union and correſpondence between man and man, muſt neceſſarily become the means of diſuniting and eſtranging them from one another.

Truth hereupon becomes a branch of righteouſneſs, what every man hath a right to claim and expect from every man, as it is the proper and natural uſe of that inſtrument of ſociety, which our common maker has furniſhed us with for our mutual advantage: and therefore "a righteous man hateth lying."

In fact this is what every man would expect and deſire from others. The moſt

moſt common liar, the falſeſt witneſs, the moſt perfidious covenant-breaker, would have others ſpeak the truth to him, and is ready to complain when they do not: and therefore by that obvious rule of equity, of doing as we would be done unto, every man has a right to expect and claim the ſame thing from us.

And unleſs truth be inviolably obſerved in every thing, the bonds of human ſociety cannot fail to be weakened. If a man allow himſelf to throw off a regard to truth in one inſtance, when this is known, it is impoſſible that others ſhould be aſſured where he will ſtop; and conſequently mutual confidence muſt be deſtroyed. It is a man's profeſſing that he eſteems truth ſacred in itſelf, and conſequently in all caſes, that is the ſecurity for relying upon his word in any caſe. As long as we cannot charge him with any violation of it, we are obliged to credit him. But when he is convicted of falſhood; and eſpecially if he declares that he thinks himſelf not bound to the obſervation of truth in ſome caſes; as that "faith is not to be kept with hereticks;" or that he ſhould not ſcruple a lie for its own ſake, unleſs upon account

of ſome farther miſchief attending it: then, I ſay, a man will juſtly be eſteemed to diſclaim the ſacredneſs of truth in itſelf; and ſo his neighbour cannot believe him upon his bare word. It cannot be wondered at, that a known liar hardly meets with credit, even when he ſpeaks truth: thus the leaſt impeachment of a man's veracity juſtly weakens his credit, and others' confidence in him.

Every man muſt be ſenſible, what miſchief the univerſal prevalence of this vice would bring upon the world. The prophet Jeremiah gives a melancholy deſcription of it in the corrupt ſtate of Iſrael. "Take ye heed every one of his neigh-
"bour, and truſt ye not in any brother; for
"every brother will utterly ſupplant, and
"every neighbour will walk with ſlan-
"derers. And they will deceive every
"one his neighbour, and will not ſpeak
"the truth; they have taught their
"tongue to ſpeak lies, and weary them-
"ſelves to commit iniquity."

The ſight of abounding falſhood in the world brought in the uſe of oaths; in hope that by a direct appeal to God, and a ſolemn imprecation of his vengeance

ance in caſe of perjury, men who are not reſtrained within the bounds of truth in common caſes, might be awed into veracity upon important occaſions by an immediate appeal to Almighty God. This practice in the preſent degenerate ſtate of human nature is plainly countenanced by God in ſcripture; and by the general conſent of all civilized nations "an oath "for confirmation is an end of all ſtrife;" as the laſt appeal which men can make, and therefore the higheſt teſt of their veracity. And if men can allow themſelves to falſify not only their word, but their oath, there is nothing by which they can be held, nor any ſecurity they can give to ſociety; and therefore they muſt forfeit all the benefits of it, as perſons who are not capable of being members of it.

But we ſhould conſider ourſelves as always under the eye of God, as well in what we ſay as in what we ſwear. If this was the general temper, there would be no occaſion for the ſolemnity of oaths: and if men loſe ſight of this in common life, ſo as contentedly and cuſtomarily to proſtitute truth, even where there is no direct appeal to God, their oath it-

ſelf will hardly be ſufficient to produce a full confidence in their veracity.

The argument in the text is likewiſe particularly applicable to chriſtians. "We are members one of another," in a more diſtinguiſhing ſenſe, as we belong to the body of Chriſt. And this lays additional engagements upon all the members of that body to "put away lying, and to ſpeak the truth one to another."

We ſhould do this in conformity to the common Father, to whom we belong; who is eminently ſtiled "a God of truth." "His words are true." They are not only agreeable to the true nature of things, but are ſuited to convey the divine mind plainly and without diſguiſe to us. His promiſes are ſure and certain, ſuch as may firmly be relied upon. Falſhood is as impoſſible to him as any other imperfection. "God is not a man, that he "ſhould lie. His promiſe and his oath "are two immutable things, in which it "is impoſſible for God to lie." And if this is a perfection ſo eſſential to the Supreme Being, and which we have ſo much reaſon to venerate in him; if we deſerve the character of his children, we ſhall imitate this part of his moral character.

In

In conformity to the example of Chriſt, there ſhould be a ſtrict obſervance of truth among chriſtians. He came into the world, "to bear witneſs to it." And he was "the faithful and true witneſs; revealing the mind of God with the greateſt exactneſs, and having "no guile found in his mouth," in any part of his converſation.

Moreover, chriſtians are under the ſtrongeſt engagements to veracity becauſe of the ſtreſs laid upon it in the rule, by which all the members of Chriſt's body are to be governed. The obſervance of truth is preſcribed there in the ſtrongeſt and moſt unlimited term. It is recommended by the cleareſt expreſſions of God's approbation. "Lying lips are "an abomination to the Lord: but they "that deal truly, are his delight." And eternal death is expreſsly denounced as the portion of liars. Whoſoever "maketh "a lie, ſhall in no wiſe enter into the "kingdom of heaven." And the ſame is ſaid of "him who loveth and maketh a lie."

Since then we name the name of Chriſt, let us comply with the exhortation in the

text. "If any man ſeemeth to be reli-"gious, and bridleth not his tongue," particularly from lying, ſurely "that man's religion is vain." And therefore we ſhould uſe the moſt effectual means to ſecure our veracity.

We ſhould maintain a conſtant ſenſe of the great evil of falſhood, and of the excellence of truth; as the one is contrary to the God of truth, and the other his image; the one deſtructive of ſociety, and the other the greateſt ſtrength and ſecurity to it.

We ſhould be upon our guard againſt every thing that may be a temptation to falſhood. Guilt needs a lie to excuſe it. Covetouſneſs may prompt to falſhood for gratifying it; but a woe is entailed upon all ſuch gains. "The getting of "treaſures by a lying tongue, is a vani-"ty toſſed to and fro of them that ſeek "death." Malice and ill-will ſometimes lead to falſe charges to ſupport them, when the reputation of an adverſary cannot be ſunk by true accuſations. And raſh ſpeaking often betrays men into falſhood unawares. All theſe therefore ſhould be carefully guarded againſt by every lover of truth.

We

We ought to take heed of any appearance of evil in this caſe; to keep at a remote diſtance from any thing that borders upon falſhood. This is the ſureſt way to avoid any vice.

And finally, as in the practice of every other duty, and the avoiding of every other ſin, ſo here, we ſhould join prayer to God with our own care and endeavours, in ſuch language as that of the Pſalmiſt, "Remove far from me the way of lying." Amen.

SERMON VI.

GOD MORE TO BE FEARED THAN MAN.

ISAIAH li. 12, 13.

Who art thou, that thou ſhouldeſt be afraid of a man that ſhall die, and of the ſon of man, which ſhall be made as graſs? And forgetteſt the Lord thy Maker, that hath ſtretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?

THOUGH we are fully convinced in ſpeculation of the truth implied in theſe words, that God is to feared rather than man, in the conduct of our lives

lives we frequently act in direct oppoſition to it. We deliberately do thoſe things which God in his holy law hath forbidden, when we are by men commanded or ſollicited to do them; we readily omit thoſe things which God hath expreſsly, and under the ſevereſt penalties enjoined, when the doing of them might render us obnoxious to the diſpleaſure of men. By ſuch neglect of duties which God hath preſcribed, by ſuch commiſſion of ſins which God hath prohibited, into which we are betrayed by our immoderate care not to offend men, we do more plainly ſignify it to be our ſettled opinion, that man is more to be feared than God, than we can by, any declarations or profeſſions of our faith, ſhew it to be our real perſuaſion that God is more to be feared than man.

It may therefore be of uſe, in this diſcourſe, to prove that it is a certain matter of fact, that men are often more governed by the fear of man than of God; to enquire how this comes to paſs; to ſhow the extreme folly and unreaſonableneſs of it; and to give ſome directions by which we may conquer the vicious and immoderate fear of man.

If

If we obſerve the actions of others, or reflect upon our own; if we examine the ſprings of our actions, and the ends we propoſe to ourſelves in acting, we ſhall ſoon be convinced that the fear of man often incites us to action more powerfully than the fear of God; that the approving ourſelves to the good opinion of men is frequently our aim and deſign, more than the juſtifying ourſelves in the ſight of God. For, whenever we commit any ſins in ſecret, which we are afraid to commit openly; when we ſeek retirement and ſolitude, in order to cover our guilt from the cogniſance of men, we then ſhew that the fear of man lays a greater reſtraint on us, than the fear of God, becauſe we dare not venture to do that in the preſence of our fellow-creatures, which we preſume to do in the ſight of our Creator.

When we affect to appear to the world religious and virtuous, but take no care to be what we would appear; when we "have the form of godlineſs without the power of it;" when we put on ſheep's cloathing to hide the wolf, or fox, or goat, that lurks within; we then alſo ſhew, that the fear of man hath greater efficacy

efficacy upon us, than the fear of God; since that is strong enough to make us hypocrites, whilst this is not vigorous enough to work its proper effect in making us inwardly and sincerely good.

When we are ashamed of owning the principles of our religion, though we do really believe them; when we at any time affect to appear worse than we truly are, for fear of incurring the censure of preciseness or singularity, if we should profess ourselves influenced by religion: we then also shew, that the fear of man awes us more than the fear of God; since the former causes us to smother and stifle that open profession, which the latter requires, but doth not prevail upon us to make.

Whenever we conceal any past sin by denying it, and have a recourse to lying, in order to escape the punishment or shame annexed by human laws, or by the opinion of the world, to actions penal or scandalous, we do then also shew, that we are more influenced by the fear of men, than of God; since that makes us hazard our eternal salvation by contracting new guilt, whilst this is not powerful enough to make us confess our past,

or avoid future and greater tranſgreſſions.

When we are engaged in any evil courſes, and being convinced of our miſtakes, do ſtill knowingly perſiſt in them, leſt by changing our meaſures we ſhould be thought to have been once confeſſedly in the wrong; this obſtinacy is another indication of our fearing men more than God; ſince we had rather offend him by going on in a falſe way, than by retreating forfeit the eſteem of men, as having been before miſtaken or miſled.

When we conform ourſelves to the unwarrantable cuſtoms of the world, and fall in with the prevailing follies or vices of the age and place we live in, purely for fear of being thought unfaſhionable or ill-bred; this undue compliance is another proof of our fearing man more than God; ſince our conformity to the world is the effect of the one, whilſt the other hath no power to make us transform ourſelves "by the renewing of our mind "to do what is the good, and accepta- "ble, and perfect will of God."

When our conſciences are ſo yielding and pliant, that we can make them eaſily bend to our intereſts; when we can

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ſo readily ſhift our ſails, as to ſteer with every wind; when our principles change with the times, and luckily fall in with every occaſion, we then evidently ſhew, that the fear of men lays a ſtronger biaſs on our minds, than the fear of God; ſince that draws us aſide at pleaſure, whilſt this is too weak to keep us ſteady in the narrow path of duty.

In fine, when "tribulation or perſecution ariſeth becauſe of the word," and by and by many are offended; when men abjure their religion to ſave their fortunes or lives, and to avoid a preſent trouble run headlong into ſuch pernicious practices, as will render them obnoxious to everlaſting perdition; it is undeniable, that in this inſtance they are under greater dread of men than of God; ſince bodily death, which is the utmoſt men threaten, ſeems ſo formidable, that to eſcape it, they run the riſque of that eternal death which ſhall be the final lot of thoſe, "who denying Chriſt before men, ſhall "be denied by him, before his Father "which is in heaven."

As evident therefore as it is, that men commit thoſe ſins in ſecret, which they dare not commit openly; that they take more

more care to appear religious, than really to be religious; that in a licentious and debauched age they are afraid to own themſelves to be under the influence of religion; that they commit greater ſins to hide leſs; that they chuſe rather obſtinately to perſiſt in an evil practice, than to own they have been acting wrong; that they chuſe rather to break the laws of God, than to be unfaſhionable; that they are time-ſervers, and can bend their principles every way to promote their intereſt; that they make ſhipwreck of their faith when ſtorms ariſe, and fall away in times of perſecution; ſo evident is it, that in the conduct of their lives they are more ſwayed by the fear of men, than they are by the fear of God.

Now, ſince there is a vaſt difference betwixt the evils threatened by men, and thoſe threatened by God; ſince the nature of fear is ſuch, that it uſually operates more or leſs in proportion to the object feared; ſince, notwithſtanding this, it is undeniable matter of fact, that the miſchiefs threatened by men do influence us more than thoſe which are denounced by God; it will not be improper, in the

next

next place, to enquire how this comes to paſs.

As to the caſe of habitual, profligate, daring ſinners, their conduct in this matter is eaſily accounted for. By a conſtant, uninterrupted courſe of ſinning, they have worn out all ſenſe of religion, all notions of God, all apprehenſions of a future ſtate, and a judgment to come. Theſe men therefore are not to be reſtrained by the fear of ſuch evils, as having often wiſhed, and ſometimes called, they are apt now to think, imaginary. But this conduct is not ſo eaſy to be accounted for in the caſe of thoſe who profeſs to be, and who ſincerely are perſuaded of the truth of religion; who believe that the puniſhments threatened againſt ſinners in the ſcriptures, are really denounced in the word of God, and will by his hand be certainly inflicted; and yet are inſenſibly carried away, by the awe of men, to do ſuch things as they aſſuredly know will draw upon them the diſpleaſure of God. Yet here again, if the evils threatened are very terrible, ſuch as a cruel and ſhameful death, or lingering and tormenting pains, this conduct is not ſo

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ſurpriſing, as that we ſhould be at a loſs to ſhow the cauſes of it, though we muſt allow it to be, after all, highly unreaſonable. For there is in us ſuch an unconquerable averſion to exquiſite pain; miſery and torment are ſo ſhocking to fleſh and blood, ſo repugnant to that love of ourſelves which God hath implanted in our breaſts; that it requires either a particular ſtrength of mind and natural courage, or an extraordinary degree of divine ſupport to bear up againſt ſuch fiery trials, and to ſtand our ground firmly againſt ſuch ſharp and ſtrong temptations.

The man who hath ſo much government of himſelf, as not to be allured by the pleaſures of the world, may not yet be ſo far maſter of his paſſions, may not have ſuch an entire command over his blood and ſpirits, as not to be daunted by the terrors of it. Every diſciple of Chriſt is not ſo great a proficient in the doctrine of the croſs, as to reach to that fulneſs of ſtature in Chriſt, to which St. Paul was arrived, when he could, without arrogance, declare his undaunted courage and reſolution of mind in that magnanimous, but ſincere, profeſſion, which

which we find him making: "Who "shall separate us from the love of Christ? "Shall tribulation, or distress, or perse- "cution, or famine, or nakedness, or "peril, or sword? Nay, in all these "things we are more than conquerors, "through him that loved us. For I am "persuaded, that neither death, nor life, "nor angels, nor principalities, nor pow- "ers, nor things present, nor things to "come, nor height, nor depth, nor any "other creature, shall be able to separate "us from the love of God, which is in "Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now if persecution be so strong a temptation, and the faith of the generality of christians be so weak, it is no great matter of surprise, that men should often yield to the violence of such pressing trials; and should be over-awed into sinful compliances, by the fear of those evils, which, though they bear no proportion to the wrath of God, that shall be revealed in the last day, are yet strong enough to betray the succours which reason and religion offer. For as it is impossible for men, when they are under the pressure of a sharp, violent, and tormenting pain, to suspend the

thought

thought of that pain, and to apply themſelves cloſely and calmly to other matters; ſo is it next to impoſſible for thoſe, who are under the terrors of a grievous evil, hanging over their heads, and caſting a damp upon their ſpirits, to call off their thoughts from the conſideration of it, ſo far as to bring into their minds the views of religion, to examine coolly and deliberately the tendency and iſſue of that action, to which they are tempted; to ſet the dangers of compliance againſt the dangers of refuſal; to weigh impartially the reaſons, which may be offered on the one ſide, and on the other, and to judge according to the merits of the cauſe, after they have diſtinctly and fully ſummed up the evidence. Such a ſteady procedure, as this, is not to be expected from men diſordered by any paſſion, much leſs from thoſe, who are diſturbed by the emotions of fear: and the remedy, which ſhould cure theſe diſorders, being not at hand, or they not diſpoſed to make uſe of it, it is no wonder, if the diſeaſe be not checked; or if the evils threatned by men do over-awe them, when the evils denounced by God cannot, during the violence of the temp-

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tation, be brought ſo far within view, as to over-balance them.

If men therefore were only influenced to ſin againſt God by the fear of ſuch grievous calamities, as are moſt ſhocking to human nature, this conduct would be, though unreaſonable, yet not unaccountable. But what account can be given, why men venture the loſs of their immortal ſouls, to avoid evils of a much leſs magnitude; ſuch as ſhame, diſrepute, diſeſteem, the diſpleaſure of ſuperiors, the diſlike of equals, or even ſometimes the diſapprobation of inferiors? How come ſuch light, trivial, inconſiderable evils as theſe are, to weigh ſo much with us, as to make us rather run the hazard of our eternal welfare, than the riſque of ſuch evils as are terrible only in imagination?

The beſt account I am able to give of ſuch an extravagant and unjuſtifiable conduct, is this: the ſins to which men are drawn by ſuch ſlight temptations, are not uſually of that flagrant and heinous kind, as thoſe to which they are tempted by the terror of greater evils. As the temptation is much weaker, ſo the ſins to which they are tempted are much

much lighter: though therefore they cannot plead the violence of the temptation; yet they are apt to hope, that the ſins into which they are ſo eaſily betrayed, being not of the deepeſt die, will the ſooner be blotted out. Should they offend men by an obſtinate and unſeaſonable virtue, they would immediately incur the effects of their diſpleaſure: ſhould men once be angry with them, they might not be able, with all their care, to recover their favour: ſhould they afterwards beg pardon for the offence which they have given, this pardon might not be granted: ſhould an ill opinion be once formed of them, it might be out of their power to regain a good one: ſhould an ill report be ſpread of them, it might be difficult to retrieve their character. The danger therefore of offending men being ſo great, the miſchief of it ſo irretrievable, they cannot, as they think, be too careful to avoid it. But on the other ſide, if they ſhould by any ſinful compliance offend God, yet the puniſhment for ſuch tranſgreſſion is, they ſuppoſe, at a great diſtance; though it ſhould, if executed, be as ſevere as it is in ſcripture repreſented, yet they think

it may be prevented by repentance. God, they ſay, is not an implacable and auſtere judge, who will take the advantage of frail creatures; but is always ready to forgive thoſe, who return to him, and to their duty. As ſoon as we recover our integrity, we ſhall be immediately reconciled to his favour: "he will not deal with us after our ſins," if we renounce them; "nor reward us according to our iniquities," if we are reclaimed from them. "As the hea-"ven is high above the earth, ſo "great is his mercy" above the mercy of men: "as far as the eaſt is from the weſt, ſo far," upon our repentance, will "he remove our tranſgreſſions from us." Since therefore God is ſo ſlow to anger, and ſo ready to forgive; ſince men are ſo eaſy to be offended, and ſo difficult to be entreated, this exceeding mercy of God, which the Pſalmiſt thought a good ground for his being feared, is often the occaſion of man's being more feared than God. No good reaſon can be aſſigned for a conduct ſo irrational; thoſe which have been alledged are the beſt I am able to give.

But

But whether we proceed upon theſe, or any other grounds, in being more influenced by the fear of man, than of God, ſuch a procedure will eaſily be proved highly irrational and ſinful.

By the order of nature our paſſions ought to be under the government of reaſon; by the laws of God they ought to be ſubject to the rules of religion. Our reaſon tells us, that the greateſt evils, are moſt to be feared; our religion teaches us, that the evils to come are exceedingly greater than any we can feel at preſent: both reaſon therefore and religion agree to condemn the avoiding leſſer evils, by running into greater, which we always do, when out of fear to offend men, we preſume to ſin againſt God. Nor is the unreaſonableneſs of ſuch a conduct diſproved by the ſuppoſed diſtance of the evils annexed to the breach of God's laws; for it is the proper office of reaſon to repreſent to our view ſuch things, as are not perceivable by our ſenſes. We are not other ways diſtinguiſhed from unthinking and irrational creatures, than becauſe they are confined to the perception of preſent ſenſible things, whilſt we have the power of

reviewing what is paſt, of foreſeeing what is to come, and of repreſenting to our thoughts ſuch objects as are beyond the reach of ſenſe. Though therefore to the eye a greater object at a diſtance may ſeem leſs, a leſs object placed nearer may ſeem greater, than it really is; yet it is the buſineſs of reaſon to correct this error of ſenſe: ſo that if we judge of evils to come, and of thoſe which are preſent, by our reaſon, and not by our ſenſes, we ſhall compare them one with another, as they are in themſelves, without any regard to their ſeveral diſtances: we ſhall conſider, that thoſe evils which are now future, will ſome time be preſent; that it is of no concern to us, how they appear, when we apprehend them as far removed from us, but how they will then appear, when they come to be actually felt by us. If therefore our reaſon doth aſſure us, that when they ſhall be preſent, they will greatly exceed thoſe evils, which we would avoid as being nearer at hand, the diſtance of them will not make it reaſonable in us to hazard them, whilſt the certainty of their befalling us is ſo great, that our reaſon brings

brings them home to our view, repreſents them to us, as if they were now preſent, and ſo takes away all the diſadvantage of their diſtance.

When the evils by which we are tried are very grievous, the yielding to ſo ſtrong a temptation will indeed be leſs criminal, in the degree in which they hindered us from attending to the dictates of reaſon, and the precepts of the goſpel. God will have compaſſion upon our infirmities; he will conſider the violence of the temptation, and the frailty of our natures, and will proportion the degrees of our puniſhment to thoſe degrees of guilt, which our tranſgreſſions, upon a full and impartial view of all circumſtances, ſhall be found juſtly chargeable with. But though this may extenuate, it will not extinguiſh our guilt; for if the ſins into which we are hurried by ſuch violent temptations, are very heinous and provoking, the greatneſs of the ſins may ſhut us out from thoſe hopes of mercy which we might have entertained, from conſidering the ſtrength of the temptation: but on the other ſide, if the ſins into which we are

betrayed by the fear of men be leſs; and the evils, by the dread of which we are ſeduced, are alſo leſs, the weakneſs of the temptation will add very much to the weight of the ſin. Whether therefore the ſins which we commit to avoid the diſpleaſure of men, be grievous, and the temptations to them ſtrong; or whether the temptations be feeble, and the ſins of a leſs heinous kind; on one ſide the greatneſs of the ſin, and on the other ſide the weakneſs of the temptation, will render us, according to the meaſures of unprejudiced reaſon, and the rules of our holy religion, altogether inexcuſable.

Now if we are convinced that ſuch a conduct as this, whatever cauſes may be aſſigned for it, is highly unreaſonable; if by the tenor of the goſpel it is evident that ſuch an immoderate fear of men is directly oppoſite to the rules of our holy religion; if, being convinced of the unreaſonableneſs and ſinfulneſs of ſuch an irregular fear of men, we would for the future preſerve ourſelves from it, it will be proper in the laſt place to conſider how we may ſubdue a paſſion, the diſorders of which are owned to be ſo great; how we

we may rectify that conduct, which is acknowledged to be so irregular.

In order to this, it will be proper for us to recollect what hath been before observed of the occasions of this wrong conduct. We fear men more than God, because the evils threatened by men are apprehended to be nearer, than those threatened by God. To weaken the force of this motive to the fear of men, we should consider that this apprehension of ours may be false; for though the sentence of God against evil works is not always executed speedily, yet the judgments of God do sometimes seize upon the sinner, even in the very act of sinning. But allowing them to be as yet far removed, and to advance with the slowest pace; yet the disproportion which they bear to the forest evils men can inflict, is so great, that if we view them together, the "treasures of wrath which "are laid up against the day of wrath," cannot appear light and inconsiderable, notwithstanding their present distance.

But to take away all danger of our being imposed upon by viewing them as far remote, we ought in our thoughts

to bring them nearer to us; we ought often to "set the terrors of the Lord in array" before us; to meditate on those lively characters which the holy scriptures give us of the glory and majesty of God, and those striking and sensible images which we there meet with, of the horror and consternation which the mightiest of men shall be under, when God shall exert his power, and stretch forth his arm to execute vengeance upon sinners. If by this means the fear of God hath once taken possession of our hearts, there will be no room for any other fear: this will employ, this will engross all our thoughts; and the most dreadful evils which men can threaten, will be disarmed of all their terror, when compared to evils so much more formidable.

And as it will be useful thus to represent to ourselves those terrors of the Lord, which we shall by no skill be able to escape, by no firmness of mind be able to endure, if we should provoke the divine displeasure by tamely yielding to the temptations of sinful men; so it will be farther expedient for us to strengthen our

our good reſolutions, by conſidering thoſe ſupports which we may expect from God, if we bravely and manfully bear up againſt thoſe trials, by which our virtue is at any time aſſaulted. The ſame power of God which will be manifeſted in our puniſhment, if we give way to the vicious fear of men, will exert itſelf for our aſſiſtance, that we may effectually overcome it.

Having therefore ſuch threatenings to deter us againſt all ſinful compliances, and ſuch promiſes to ſupport us in the conſcientious diſcharge of our duty, in ſpite of all temptations from men to the contrary, let us act like men who are endued with reaſon, and like chriſtians who are ſtrong in faith. Let us carefully compare the evils threatened by God and men; judge of them according as they ſhall appear upon the compariſon; and according to our judgments, ſo let us act. "Wherefore ſhould we be a-"fraid of a man that ſhall die, and of "the ſon of man, which ſhall be made "as graſs? and forget the Lord our "Maker, that hath ſtretched forth the "heavens, and laid the foundations of "the earth?" Let not young perſons,

who have been bred up in the knowledge and fear of God, and whose innocence yet continues untainted, suffer themselves to be frighted or to be laughed out of their innocence, by the reproaches and scoffs of wicked seducers, who are wont to treat all such as timorous and pusillanimous, who profess themselves to be under the restraints of religion, and are afraid to transgress the commandments of God. Let not good nature, and good breeding, which dispose those who are endued with these excellent qualities to live agreeably with all men, and to seek the love and esteem of those with whom they familiarly converse, prove unto them an occasion of falling, by extending their complaisance so far, as to incur the displeasure of God, for fear of displeasing ungodly men. Let not those who have listed themselves under the colours of any party, when they find their leaders carrying them into any measures, which in their hearts they cannot but condemn as disagreeable to the rules of justice or charity, concur in such measures against the dictates of their own conscience, for fear of being suspected and treated as deserters of their party.

party. In ſhort, let us all duly conſider, and carefully remember, and in the whole conduct of our lives act like thoſe who are convinced, that it is no part of true courage to defy the Almighty, nor any ſign of cowardice to be afraid of everlaſting condemnation:

From which, God of his infinite mercy preſerve us all, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord!

SERMON VII.

THE REASONABLENESS OF RELIGION.

JOB xxi. 15.

What is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him?

THE ſervice of God is the ſame thing with practical religion, or leading a ſober, righteous, and godly life in this preſent world. The duties of godlineſs are thoſe in which we more immediately

ately serve God, having not only a more direct, but, in some sense, our sole regard to him. In the worship of God we attend upon him, as servants on their master; we direct our eyes and expectations, our thoughts and affections, to him, as the supreme object of our adoration, and love, and trust. The same may be said of the term religion, as of the service of God, that it most strictly and emphatically denotes the duties we immediately owe to God, such as fear, and hope, and love, and dependance; prayer to him for such things as we want; giving of thanks for the mercies we have received, and offerings of praise on the account of his infinite excellencies and perfections. But though, more exactly speaking, this is what is peculiarly meant by serving of God, or religion, yet in another sense, and that far from being improper, serving God, or religion, comprehends the duties of temperance, and justice, as well as piety. For, though temperance, or sobriety, immediately respects ourselves, and justice, or righteousness, our neighbour, yet in both we are to be influenced by a constant regard to the will, and approbation,

bation, and glory of God, as a principal motive and reaſon of our actions.

Religion, or the ſervice of God, thus underſtood as an equivalent expreſſion for a virtuous and good life, is, in the opinion of ſome men, a thing without any juſt foundation. They think there is little or nothing to be ſaid for it, or pretend to think ſo; and therefore aſk, with a ſort of inſult, "what is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him?"

In oppoſition to this inſinuation, I ſhall undertake to ſhew that religion is grounded on good reaſon, having its foundation in the exiſtence and nature of God; in the nature of man; and in the relation which ſubſiſts between both.

The being of a God is not an idle fanciful notion, but a ſacred and eternal truth, witneſſed by the whole univerſe; by the heavens and the earth, by all things within and without, above and below, and all around us: ſo that we may as reaſonably doubt whether any thing at all is, as whether there be a God, who is the cauſe of all other things, the contriver and maker of this viſible world,

world, and fountain of all the beauty and order that we obſerve in it.

And this great being is truly and properly Almighty. How elſe could he raiſe this immenſe fabric of heaven and earth? How bring it out of nothing? How uphold and keep it together? He is omnipreſent and omniſcient; is every where, and knows what is done every where. How elſe could he preſerve and govern all things which he hath made? Can he act where he is not? Or order things as they ought to be ordered, and as it is manifeſt they are ordered, without knowing all the powers and faculties of his creatures, and what the ſtate of things requires throughout the world?

And further, the ſame God, whoſe preſence, and power, and knowledge are thus infinite, is likewiſe moſt holy, juſt, good, merciful, faithful, and true; and in all theſe attributes "is without the leaſt variableneſs or ſhadow of "turning." How elſe would he be the moſt perfect being? Which is the notion that the univerſal reaſon of mankind teaches them to form of him that is ſupreme and ſelf-exiſtent.

Since

Since then there is a God, and that God such a being as hath been now described, we may conclude, that religion must be a wise and reasonable service, being evidently founded in the existence and nature of this Almighty Being. Is there an all-perfect being? Then it must be fit and proper that all other beings, capable of it, should reverence, adore, and worship him; extol him for his incomprehensible excellencies, and prostrate themselves in his presence. And what is this but religion? Is there an Almighty God? It is undeniable then, that there is a being who can save or destroy us, make us happy or miserable; and, consequently, that the favour of this great Being is what, above all things, we should endeavour to secure, and his displeasure that which we should labour, more than all things, to avoid. And how is this to be done, but by serving him humbly and faithfully, that is, by the means and methods which religion prescribes? Is this Almighty God ever present with us, and a witness to all our words and actions? It concerns us then, in point of necessary prudence and wisdom, at all times to behave as in his presence,

presence, and under his eye, that is, to be religious. Are holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, essential attributes of the divine nature? Is the Almighty God glorious in holiness? the omniscient and only wise God immutably faithful and true? And are not these perfections then, of holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, if they are imitable by us, such as deserve to be imitated, and which it is our undoubted duty to imitate? Can a being endued with reason act more reasonably than by endeavouring to resemble God in all those perfections, in which it is possible for him to resemble such a being? We cannot, properly, imitate the Almighty power, the infinite presence, the boundless knowledge of God, and therefore it would be absurd and impious for us to attempt it. Nor shall our necessary imperfection in any of these be imputed to us as a crime. But we may, according to our scanty measure, imitate his goodness, his faithfulness, his righteousness, and purity; "be holy as he is holy, merciful as he "is merciful, perfect as he is perfect." And while we imitate God, we cannot but please him; and this not by flatter-

flattering a blind and partial self-love (which can have no room in a perfect nature) but by reason of his love of righteousness, of which he is the original fountain, and most glorious pattern. Now is not this reason sufficient why it should be our most earnest and constant care to imitate him? And what is the imitation of God in his moral perfections but religion? Religion, then, appears to be founded in the existence and nature of God, and to be, on that account, a most wise and reasonable thing; if it be our wisdom to please the most powerful being, and to imitate the best and most perfect.

Secondly; Religion is founded in the nature of man, and is therefore reasonable. When the wicked and ungodly ask, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?" let them only consider what kind of beings those are who are required to serve the Almighty. We are beings compounded of body and soul. Our bodies are surrounded with innumerable and most threatening dangers, and naturally weak and defenceless; have many craving and low appetites, in the gratification of which they

are

are capable of none but mean and low pleasures; are subject to manifold wants, and passions, and diseases, while with much trouble and difficulty they are kept in life; after which, having passed through an infirm, short, and variable being, they go to the dead. Our souls are of a rank and order much advanced above our bodies, capable of nobler pleasures than the body, and of greater pains than it is usually exposed to; possessed of several powers and faculties excellent in their nature, but which may become the foundation of our guilt and shame, and the means and instruments of our torment and misery, if neglected and unimproved, if spoiled and vitiated. In a word, our souls are not subject to the empire of death, as our bodies, but by their nature fitted for an endless life.

Now, if our bodies are encompassed with innumerable dangers, and naturally weak and defenceless; the wisest course we can take is plainly this, to put ourselves under the protection of one who hath the power that we want, and is as willing as he is able to guard and defend us. The only being that will answer

fwer this character is God, he, concerning whom we hear the wicked aſking, "Who is the Almighty?" And the only way of putting ourſelves under the protection of this Almighty and moſt gracious Being, is religion, or ſuch a temper of mind, and manner of life, as is acceptable to him.

Again; our bodies have many craving and low appetites, in the gratification of which they are capable of none but mean and low pleaſures. This being ſo, our appetites ought to be bridled and moderated, not indulged to the utmoſt; foraſmuch as the pleaſures that attend ſuch an exceſſive indulgence, are too inconſiderable to be regarded as the principal pleaſures of reaſonable beings; and, if not their principal pleaſures, ſhould no further be allowed of, and enjoyed, than they are conſiſtent with thoſe purſuits which are the higheſt gratifications of the man, and moſt worthy of him. Not to add, that the pleaſures of exceſs will by no means make amends for the many inconveniencies it immediately and almoſt neceſſarily expoſes us to. Now what is the rule by which we are to moderate our ſenſual appetites, and to preſerve

preserve the subordination between the pleasures of the body and the mind? What is it but religion? And what else is the ground of those loud complaints which sinners make against religion, but its laying restraints on our carnal appetites, that is, in plain truth, requiring us to act like men, creatures made for better pleasures than those which flow from the gratification of the animal appetites?

Another thing observed concerning the body is, its being subject to manifold wants, and passions, and diseases. And here likewise every particular shews the wisdom of religion. We labour under many wants; and the reason of our indigence is, that "our good is not in our hand" or power, as it follows in the verse after the text; that is, we have not the command of all those things that are necessary for the supply of our wants: but there is one above us that hath, whom therefore it is our interest to make our friend, that from his friendship we may be assured of that portion of worldly good that is most convenient for us; and more than that, it cannot be our wisdom to desire. Our wants therefore should

ſhould perſuade us to be religious, religion being the only title to the care and bleſſing of Providence.

Our paſſions are great enemies to the order and happineſs of life, if not kept within proper bounds. Now, this is one thing which religion aims at; I mean, the regulation of our paſſions and affections, placing them on their right objects, and limiting them to their juſt meaſure, that ſo they may be uſeful, like fire in its proper place, or rivers of water flowing along in their channel; not ruinous and deſtructive, as fire in a conflagration, or ſtorms and floods that ſweep all before them. Religion propoſes and requires, that we exerciſe a proper government over our paſſions; and it will beſt inſtruct us how to perform what it requires; and, on that account, is viſibly ſuited to our nature, and therefore to be eſteemed a moſt wiſe and reaſonable thing.

Whereas it hath been alſo obſerved that theſe bodies of ours are obnoxious to ſickneſs and diſeaſes, this too may be improved into an argument of the wiſdom of religion; for though, of that troop of diſeaſes that beſiege the human body, ſome are unavoidable; yet

others

others, I may say the greater part of those distempers that make the misery of man to be so great upon him, are not; but the effects of irregular conduct, and of indulgence and excess in one kind or other: of which excesses and irregularities, did men attend to the voice of reason and religion, they would not be guilty; they would then be sober and temperate in all things, and by this means promote the health of their bodies, and the comfort of their lives. From whence it follows, that religion is founded in the nature of man, and, consequently, in reason.

It was further added, that the body, after a short and variable life, mingles with the dead. Great therefore is the wisdom of religion, which, though it does not pretend to teach us any such secret as the art of rendering our bodies immortal in this world, yet tells us by what way we may soften the terrors of death, and secure a happy immortality in a future state. And, since these bodies must die, and die so shortly, as they may die suddenly, this puts us in mind that we ought less to value every thing which relates to these mortal bodies, and must pass

paſs away with them; to be leſs anxious about it, and more concerned about ſuch things as are durable and everlaſting.

And ſo much the rather, as the ſoul, the more important part of our nature, is capable of nobler pleaſures than the body, and of more ſevere pains than the body is ordinarily expoſed to ſuffer. "The ſpirit of a man may ſuſtain his in-"firmity; but a wounded ſpirit who can "bear?" As long as the ſpirit within us keeps firm and unbroken, we ſink not under the infirmities of the body, or the calamities of life. Strong reſolution, ſupported by the teſtimony of a good conſcience, can ſtruggle through any outward diſtreſs. But what can ſuſtain the drooping ſpirit, or heal the wounds which guilt has made? The eternal omnipreſent ſpirit alone can uphold the ſpirit of man, in ſuch a ſituation. The wounds which the hand of God hath inflicted, that hand alone can heal. Religion only can preſerve the peace of the mind, or reſtore it when loſt. And it is not peace alone that religion beſtows, but pleaſure too; pleaſures as exalted and divine as thoſe of the body are low and mean; as ſa-

tisfying as those of the world are anxious and vain; as lasting as those of sin are transient. It teacheth us the right use of our reasonable faculties; the use that corresponds to the nature of those faculties, and tends at once to perfect them, and render us happy.

Finally; The soul lives when the body dies, and therefore nothing that is serviceable to us only while in the body, which is the character of all other things besides religion, can merit to be the chief object of our care, and employment of our lives. Had man no pre-eminence in this respect above the beasts; were his soul composed of corruptible materials like his body, and to come to an end with it; then, indeed, the choice of the sinner would not be so very unaccountable, nor his actions so entirely void of reason, and contrary to it. It is true, even then, having the knowledge of God, his benefactor, which other creatures have not, he would be obliged to thankfulness for the benefits he received during the course of this transitory life, and religiously to own his obligations and dependance, by acts of worship and obedience. Living in society,

ety, he would likewiſe be obliged to the exerciſe of juſtice and charity towards other men; and, out of regard to his own well-being, to be temperate in all things. But if he were to act otherwiſe, his guilt and folly would be leſs, than it can be now he is deſigned for a ſtate of recompence after this life. Here we ſojourn only for a few days; very ſhortly we muſt remove into an inviſible ſtate, where nothing will ſtand us in any ſtead but the favour of the Almighty, which we muſt ſecure by a religious behaviour in this life, if we hope to enjoy the manifeſtations of it in the next. The happineſs of our ſouls, when they dwell no longer in this mortal body, will depend upon the habits they have contracted in the preſent ſtate: our works, good or evil, muſt follow us, and our prevailing diſpoſitions will abide with us. If thoſe diſpoſitions be religious, we ſhall, in the temper of our minds, be diſpoſed and qualified for the happineſs of the next world; otherwiſe we ſhall not.

The reſult is; the fear and ſervice of the Almighty, or, which is the ſame thing, true religion, is ſo far from being a groundleſs and fooliſh thing, as the

profane and ungodly pretend, that it is the wiſeſt and moſt reaſonable thing in the world, becauſe founded in the nature of man, both of his body and his ſoul, and remarkably fitted to promote the happineſs of both.

Thirdly; Religion is founded in the relation betwixt God and man, and being ſo, is highly reaſonable.

We are related to God as the author of our being, and all belonging to it; and as the author and object of our felicity. All we are, and all we poſſeſs is from God. And ſhall we ſay, "who is the "Lord, that we ſhould obey his voice?" Is he not the Lord our creator? And can there be a juſter title to obedience than this? In there any "ſpeech or language where his voice is not heard?" Do we not continually hear it, ſometimes in a ſtiller, ſometimes in a louder ſound? In the ſecret whiſpers of our own reaſon, and the diſpenſations of his providence, both of judgment and of mercy; a language that conſiderate minds will eaſily underſtand. Gratitude hath been always, and by all mankind, accounted a righteous debt from the beneficiary towards his benefactor; conſiſting in an acknowledgment of

of favours, and the beſt return he is capable of making for them; and this acknowledgment and return, as open and public as the favours and benefits have been. From hence we learn, what our gratitude ought to be, for all the gifts of nature and Providence, as well as of every other kind, to him in whom we live, move, and have our firſt being; and after what manner we ought to expreſs it. Let us be grateful, and we muſt needs be religious; religion, at leaſt the greateſt and nobleſt part of it, being nothing elſe but gratitude towards God for his innumerable mercies and benefits. Gratitude is comprehenſive both of the outward and inward part of religion; it is firſt in the heart, and from thence ſpreads its influence into the life. We cannot be truly grateful without a religious frame and temper of mind, becauſe true gratitude is more than an external appearance. And it is as plain, that we cannot be grateful without a religious life, becauſe the obligations we have to God being known unto all, our acknowledgment of them ſhould be the ſame; and the only public and ſuitable acknowledgment of God's goodneſs to

us, and of our obligations to him, is a good life, or the faithful and constant discharge of all the duties of religion, personal and relative, towards God and man. The sum is, we must renounce all pretensions to gratitude, if we renounce the ties of religion and virtue.

Nor is this all, for our reason instructs us that the Almighty is likewise the fountain of happiness, the object as well as author of it; so that we may as reasonably hope to be happy, and have nothing to make us so; as to be happy, whatever else we enjoy, in a state of alienation from God. And, this principle being granted, the inference must be, that we cannot be happy without religion; since without religion we cannot enjoy the friendship of God.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Religion appears to be founded in the existence and nature of God; the nature of man, and the relation between both; and, being thus founded, to be a wise and rational thing.

I am aware that all this will not satisfy some men. They would still object, "that in serving God they shall not serve "themselves; that, if there be a Provi-

"dence,

" dence, they do not see that the righte-
" ous are favoured by it more than o-
" thers; they may prosper if they do
" not fear God, and they may suffer ad-
" versity if they do; and they are not
" willing to serve him for nought."
This is the substance of the objection against religion, contained in the verses preceding the text. And though it hardly deserves an answer, or needs one, after what has been said to shew the wisdom of religion; yet, I would observe these two things further: that a calm and impartial view of things, as they are at present, will remove a great part of the difficulty: and, that if we take in the consideration of another life after this, and of the happiness of that life, the objection will appear to have nothing at all in it.

A calm and impartial view of things, as they are at present, will convince us, that there is very little in this objection, which yet is one of the strong holds of licentiousness. Be it granted that religion doth not ensure to men the enjoyment of outward and worldly prosperity; yet, it puts them in possession of that which is much better; it gives them content-

ment in whatever ſtate they are, at the ſame time that it allows them to make uſe of all honeſt means for rendering it more eaſy and agreeable. This effect it tends to produce in all, and actually produces, unleſs in ſome uncommon caſes, according to the degree in which it prevails. Now "godlineſs with contentment is great gain;" much greater, certainly, than any earthly poſſeſſion can be without it. Religion does not ſhut men out from any of the juſt and creditable ways of worldly gain. The righteous man is as likely to ſucceed in trade and buſineſs, and in all the affairs of life, as his wicked neighbour; nay, and more likely, having one motive to be induſtrious more than the other hath; namely, that his religion makes it his duty. It muſt be owned, that the obſervation of the wiſe man is confirmed by daily experience, "that all things come alike to all;" ſo that a man of no religion may proſper as much as he that is moſt eminent for it; and the man moſt eminent for religion may fall into the ſame ſtate of adverſity as he that hath none. But what ſhall we ſay, if in this equality of outward condition there is a wide difference

rence, in point of happineſs, between the one and the other? Now this is the plain truth of the caſe. Suppoſe the religious and the bad man to be alike proſperous; will it follow that they are alike happy? Not at all. A man is ſo far happy in any condition, and no further, as he enjoys that condition, and himſelf in it. Now a bad man enjoys neither. A good man, as far as he is good, and knows himſelf to be good, enjoys both. A wicked man enjoys not his proſperous condition, unleſs it be the ſame thing to abuſe and to enjoy it. Either his inſatiable deſires after more, prevent his taking any ſatisfaction in what he hath already; or he purſues the opportunities of ſenſual pleaſure, which his abundance affords him, to a ſatiating exceſs. The rational, the divine pleaſure of glorifying his Creator, and doing good to his fellow-creatures, in proportion to his greater abilities, he is an utter ſtranger to; the ſatisfaction reſulting from a faithful improvement of the talents committed to his truſt, keeping a good conſcience, and maintaining a character for ſteadineſs, ſobriety, and humility, in the midſt of great temptations to the con-

trary, he knows nothing of; and not knowing this, he knows not one of the sweetest and most satisfying delights that the mind of man is capable of enjoying. How great is the advantage, in all these respects, of the man who exactly follows the instructions of religion! His prosperity is a blessing to him; and enables him to be a greater blessing to the world about him; he enjoys himself together with his condition, which it is impossible the prosperous sinner should do. He hath an order and regularity in his faculties, like that in his actions, affairs, and enjoyments; and order begets harmony, and peace. His mind is in its right posture, his soul at ease. His best riches lie within. He is possessed of real worth and greatness. He therefore hath no reason to be afraid of conversing with himself, to decline the examination of his heart, and the review of his life, and to apprehend the judgment of conscience upon them; he finds the pleasure of self-converse equal to the profit of it. While the wicked man is obliged to run from his own thoughts, and loves not himself, more than he hates his own company; he now burns with

ſhame, and now trembles with fear; his paſſions tyranniſe over him, his reaſon reproaches him, his conſcience accuſes, condemns, and torments him. Miſerable ſtate! And ſtill more miſerable, if we change the ſcene, and view the ſinner in a ſtate of adverſity; for his earthly ſupports being taken away, what hath he left to ſuſtain him? Were the pleaſures of ſin greater than they are, they would not ſerve to compenſate for the diſquiet, the anguiſh and horror, which the wicked ſometimes feel in the day of affliction, but more eſpecially at the hour of death; at which time religion affords that light, peace, and comfort, which nothing elſe can give. God will "know our ſouls in adverſity," if we remember him in our more joyful days. And this, had we no other to make, is a ſufficient reply to the queſtion, "What is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him?" If we ſerve him, we may be allowed to truſt in him, under the heavieſt preſſures, and in the laſt extremities. Thus to one who only takes a calm view of the preſent ſtate of things, there appears to be little in the objection againſt religion, that it does not beſtow outward proſperity.

But if we pass on to the consideration of another life after this, and the happiness of that life, this objection will be owned to have nothing at all in it. For what is time to eternity? What are a few moments to everlasting ages? As little proportion does what befals us in the one bear to what we are to enjoy, or suffer and lose, in the other. There is nothing considerable in the greatest and most momentous affairs of the children of men, further than as they have an influence on their future state. And religion alone can give them a happy influence upon it. There is a connexion between the present moment, and the most distant hereafter; between every single action, and much more the general course of our actions, and our condition for ever. This demonstrates the infinite importance of religion; and the infinite importance of religion demonstrates its great wisdom. The present life, however spent, hath a connexion with eternity; but a religious life only with the happiness of eternity. The pleasures of sin are but for a season; the fashion of the world passeth away; all flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the grass; but religion, and all the glorious and

and bleſſed fruits of it, abide for ever. When the religious man removes into another world, he carries his good things with him, his good diſpoſitions, and his goods works; the one to be perfected, the other to be rewarded: inſtead of putting an end to his pleaſures, death enlarges, exalts and ſecures them.

We may therefore conclude without heſitation, that the ſervice of the Almighty is the beginning and the end, the foundation, and the higheſt point of true wiſdom.

And is religion the moſt reaſonable thing in the world? What then ſhould hinder us from reſolving, that we, by divine aſſiſtance, will be religious? Has a reaſonable being any other choice to make than to act reaſonably? Muſt not the happineſs of a reaſonable being be ſuitable to the nature of ſuch a being? Or can any being act contrary to his nature (I mean that which is properly ſuch, and not introduced into it by corrupt cuſtom) and yet enjoy the happineſs for which his nature fits him? Religion is founded in the very frame of our natures, employs every power in the beſt manner, perfects every faculty, and makes proviſion for the proper gratification of it. Vice, on the

the contrary, degrades human nature, deſtroys the order of the faculties, and miſerably perverts them from their right uſe. Let us then be wiſe and ſhew ourſelves men. Let us manifeſt that we have a ſenſe of our duty, by our conſtant and ready practice of it; and of our higheſt intereſt and happineſs, by ſteadily purſuing it, and making all other things ſubſervient thereto. Let us fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

IMMORTALITY BROUGHT TO LIGHT BY THE GOSPEL.

2 TIMOTHY i. 10.

But is now made manifeſt, by the appearing of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who hath aboliſhed death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the goſpel.

AS the vale of death is a road which all mankind muſt ſome time or other travel, a path in which our forefathers have gone before, and in which we

we muſt quickly follow, it is natural, and indeed of great importance, to inquire, whither it leads, and where it will bring us. Every revolving year we behold many of our acquaintance ſetting out on this journey, and ſee them enter into the duſt; but farther than this we cannot purſue them. When the earthly houſe of their tabernacle falls to the ground, it falls for aught we ſee on the head of the inhabitant, and the man periſhes under the mournful ruins. So that we ſhould hardly believe them entering into another ſtate of exiſtence, if we had no other intelligence concerning it than what ſenſe is able to give us. Our reaſon indeed may bring us better hopes, but this alone is not ſufficient to give us clear, convincing proofs of a ſtate of happineſs hereafter; ſo as to ſilence thoſe objections which a fearful imagination and a guilty conſcience are able to ſtart. No, this was a peculiar privilege reſerved for him who came to "aboliſh death, and to bring life and immortality to light."

We are not by this to underſtand, that mankind were univerſally and utterly in the dark upon this head before our

our Saviour's appearance. It is certain that the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments, has in a great measure been spread over the whole world. Indeed the expectation of this is an essential motive to the practice of virtue and goodness in the present life. Without it, religion is destitute of its proper support; and this alone seems sufficient to check and prevent the increase of wickedness among men. "He that cometh "to God must believe that he is, and "that he is the rewarder of them who "diligently seek him." As there can be no religion without the belief of a God, so if there were no expectation of being called to an account by him, and dealt with according to our behaviour, it is probable this would equally tend to its destruction. For considering the present state of human nature; how strongly men are pressed by corrupt affections and passions from within, and by numberless temptations from without; how many are the allurements to an evil course at all times; and what troubles and sufferings religion doth at some season expose men to; the hope of future rewards is absolutely necessary to balance the present difficulties

and

and diſcouragements that attend the practice of our duty. Upon this account it is reaſonable to think, that ſo needful a doctrine ſhould be in ſome meaſure evident and intelligible. There are ſeveral natural arguments in its favour, by which we may ſuppoſe a ſober heathen to have gained ſome ſatisfaction upon this point; and we find that among Gentiles as well as Jews, it was received as a truth before the ſon of God made his appearance. But we find too that this truth, was involved in conſiderable obſcurity; for in the writings of their greateſt men we meet with ſtrong expreſſions of doubt and uncertainty upon this head; and if we proceed further and aſk where, or how, men are to have their future lot of exiſtence, what are the rewards and puniſhments which the wiſe and righteous governour has determined for them, or how long good men ſhall enjoy happineſs, and wicked men ſuffer puniſhment; to theſe, and the like enquiries reaſon is ſilent, or can give no ſatisfactory anſwer. It was Jeſus Chriſt alone, who completely and fully "brought "life and immortality to light."

In the firſt place, The goſpel of Chriſt hath given us more clear and poſitive evidence

vidence of a future state than we could otherwise have had.

Although the voice of reason declares its probability, yet this singly is not enough to support a firm belief, and steady expectation of it. A man that is sensible of the imperfection of his virtue and obedience, (as every one must be who observes himself) would find it hard to discern his title to future rewards from this alone. The thought of having offended God, and especially of having often done it, would naturally create a suspicion of his favour. Now, the gospel has scattered these dark clouds by express and repeated promises of pardon on our repentance and return to God: so that revelation is not only to be considered as a new witness to the reality of a future state of happiness for the imperfectly good, but as affording greater certainty of it than reason could do. Nay, it not only gives a clearer testimony to the reality of a future state of happiness for them who fear the Lord, but it shews us where, and how, the foundation of this happiness is laid. It informs us that "God so "loved the world, that he gave his only "begotten son to die for us, that who-

"soever

"ſoever believed in him ſhould not pe-
"riſh, but have everlaſting life." Thus our faith is confirmed, and we are enabled to maintain a more ſteadfaſt and undoubted expectation of being accepted and made happy hereafter.

The goſpel has alſo brought to light the nature and manner of our future exiſtence, concerning which reaſon is altogether ſilent. As it gives better promiſes, and a more certain hope of a future ſtate of happineſs, it alſo delivers a more full account of its nature than was ever before communicated. It does not leave us entirely in the dark concerning the exiſtence of the ſoul during its ſeperation from the body, but informs us, if we are chriſtians, we ſhall no ſooner be "abſent from the body," than we ſhall be "preſent with the Lord." It teaches us that our exalted Redeemer has dominion over death and the inviſible world, that the bodies of the ſaints are now in his cuſtody, and that at his voice "all who are in the grave ſhall awake," and the ſea as well as the grave deliver up its priſoners. Nay, it not only declares by what power the ſcattered duſt ſhall be collected, and the habitation that has ſo long

long lain in ruins be rebuilt, but that he will fashion the bodies of his people "like "to his own most glorious body," so that what was "sown in weakness shall "be raised in power, what was sown in "dishonour shall be raised in glory, and "what was sown a natural shall be rai-"sed a spiritual body."

And farther, as the gospel has shewn how, and what way, our future existence is to be brought about, so it gives us a general intimation whence its happiness and misery will arise, and wherein it will consist. It assures us that good men shall be happy in the vision of God, in the participation of his likeness, and in uninterrupted and perpetual communications of bliss from that infinite fountain of perfection; and that the wicked on the other hand shall "be punished with ever-"lasting destruction from the presence of "the Lord, and from the glory of his "power," with remorse and anguish arising from a guilty awakened mind, and from the wrath of the lamb. In comparison therefore of the discoveries made in the New Testament, all the former knowledge which the world possessed upon this head was very dark, as well as defective.

defective. Let us add to what has been already offered, that this divine revelation has presented us with a glorious example of a resurrection from the dead, in that of Jesus Christ himself, which, as it is both a pledge and pattern of the resurrection of his followers, is a strong confirmation of their hopes. Thus Christ is said in the text to have "abolished death;" inasmuch as by dying and rising again, he has not only overcome it himself, but has made way for our release from its dominion.

We may also observe, that the perpetual duration of man's existence in a future state, and of the rewards and punishments that are appointed to them, is also a discovery that is chiefly owing to the christian revelation. That mankind are designed for another and more perfect state than this, appears extremely probable, even from the constitution of human nature; and that God will reward the righteous, and punish the wicked, is as certain as that "he loves righteousness and hates iniquity:" and since the present state has all the appearance of a state of trial, and not of retribution, the conclusion seems obvious

that

that there is one to follow, in which all things shall not fall alike to all, but the Almighty Lord will evidently and finally distinguish between those that serve him, and those that serve him not. But then what proportion of felicity he will bestow on the righteous, or what degree of punishment he will inflict on the wicked, and how long a time either shall be continued, can be learned only from his word. This word has insured immortal happiness to all his faithful servants, and threatened everlasting punishment as the portion of the ungodly.

Both the greatness and duration of the one and the other are represented in a manner so much clearer, inculcated so much oftener, as well as in terms more express and conclusive in the new Testament than the old, that they may justly be said even with regard to the Jewish knowledge, to be "brought to light by the gospel," and how much more with regard to the rest of mankind. And since the hope of eternal life is the greatest motive that can be proposed to animate us to our duty, and the fear of eternal condemnation is the greatest possible restraint from an evil course, this shews

ſhews of how great importance the goſpel is to the cauſe of religion and virtue, and to the intereſt of mankind.

Before we cloſe this head we may obſerve, that the obedience of the beſt of men in this ſtate of imperfection, bears no proportion to that reward which God has promiſed. Eternal life is his free and unmerited gift. Since then our title to this recompence is founded wholly upon his gracious promiſe, we could no other way enjoy any proſpect of it but from his word. On the other hand, as we are unacquainted with the exact demerits of ſin, and can form but very inadequate ideas concerning the proper meaſures to be taken in the divine government, ſo we could never have determined any thing concerning the degree, or length of puniſhment due to the wicked, had we been left to reaſon alone.

Laſtly, the goſpel ſhews in what way, and upon what terms we are to hope for the immortal life it propoſes. A very neceſſary and weighty diſcovery! For though we might in the general have concluded that God would reward and puniſh, conſidering ourſelves as ſinners we could not have known how far, in whom, or in

in what way repentance would be accepted; whether it would be allowed after great and presumptuous offences, and especially after relapses into the same sin, is what reason could not have given us assurance of. The word of God (as has been hinted before) lays a firm basis for the encouragement and hope of all sinners who come unto God through a redeemer, and affords examples of several who obtained mercy, upon their sincere application to him in the way he has appointed. Repentance and faith are urged upon us as essential to salvation; and whoever exercises these, and evidences them by a christian behaviour, persevering therein to the last, shall, we are assured, through the infinite mercies of God in Christ, be rendered happy with him to all eternity.

Lastly, the gospel has not only shewn us the way to this felicity, but because there are difficulties to be encountered in the path of our duty, we are informed where to apply for strength, both to set out, and to persist in it. Though our knowledge had been perfect concerning futurity, and the way to happiness, still we should have needed assistance to ena-

ble us to walk in it. The temptations which oppose our progress are too great for us to engage and overcome, if we are left single in the combat. The word of Christ administers instruction and consolation, as it sets before us many patterns of steady and persevering piety, and above all the perfect example of our blessed Lord; and to all these motives it adds the express promise of divine assistance, that we may be enabled to maintain our ground to the end. The divine influence will be imparted to those who seek for it, to build up christians in faith and holiness, till they shall receive the completion of both, "in the salvation of their souls."

Let what hath been said fill us with a deep sense of our obligations to Christ, who has made so glorious a discovery of a life to come. Did he descend from heaven to bring us intelligence of the future state, and shew us the way to happiness there? Did he die, arise, and ascend to his father, that he might ensure and prepare immortality for us? Let us ever remember this gracious friend, and fall in with the conclusion of the apostle, that we will not live to ourselves, "but

"but to him that died for us and rose "again."

Let us likewise value the gospel that has brought us these tidings, and diffused such a light around us. This is the noblest prize that could have been put into our hands, since it directs us how to gain an immortal crown and kingdom; and it is a privilege of which many nations are yet destitute. To us God holds forth his everlasting gospel, to be "a light to "our feet, and a lamp to our path." Let us remember that as our advantages are greater, the more strict will be our future account: "for to whom much is given, "of them will much be required:" and therefore,

Lastly, Let us see that we walk worthy of this divine and glorious revelation. What does it avail us that life and immortality are brought to light, if we look only "at the things that are seen, and "are temporal?" Or what advantage will it be that the gates of heaven are open to us, if we refuse to walk in the path that leads thither? The gospel will be so far from an advantage, that it will be a very great aggravation of our guilt and punishment at last, that we have heard

its good tidings, if we content ourſelves with hearing them, and do not labour to attain the happineſs therein propoſed to us. Let us then make it our care, as we enjoy this light, to "walk worthy of the vocati-"on wherewith we are called!" Let it be ſeen by our lives and actions, what is our faith and hope! And ſince we are by the condition of our being, ſtrangers and ſojourners upon earth, and as chriſtians, are candidates for heaven, and profeſs to ſeek that better country, let our behaviour be agreeable to our preſent ſituation and future proſpect. Let "our conver-"ſation be in heaven, from whence alſo "we look for the Saviour, the Lord Je-"ſus Chriſt, who ſhall change our vile "body, that it may be faſhioned like un-"to his glorious body, according to the "working whereby he is able even to "ſubdue all things unto himſelf.

SERMON

SERMON IX.

ON THE LOVE OF PLEASURE.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 4.

Lovers of pleaſures more than lovers of God.

IN an age of gaiety and luxury, which, if we had a mind to diſtinguiſh it from other ages, we might juſtly call the age of pleaſure; and in a country, where the taſte and purſuit of pleaſure have been

carried to a high pitch of extravagance; it cannot be improper, nay, it must be agreeable to the peculiar end of preaching, to spend some time in leading men to just and reasonable thoughts upon a subject in which their happiness, even in their own opinion, is so deeply concerned.

Let not what I have now proposed give you any apprehension that I shall be so unreasonable, as to attempt to rob you of so great and darling a good, as pleasure; or to persuade you into such a state of insensibility, or pain, as neither human nature can admit of, nor reason, or God, require. My design is quite the contrary. I am going to be an advocate for pleasure; and to shew you, as well as I can, how you may enjoy it more effectually, by enjoying it more sincere, and less mixed with unhappiness, as well as for a longer duration, even in this life, than you can in any other way.

The word pleasure, is now, by long custom in common discourse, come to be appropriated to the gratification of our senses, properly so called. And when we speak of a man of pleasure, we are always

always underſtood to mean one who is, in a peculiar manner, a follower of the pleaſures of ſenſe. The covetous man has, without doubt, his pleaſures, adapted to his own narrowneſs of ſoul, and inordinate craving after money, even that abundance of it which is quite uſeleſs to himſelf. The ambitious man has likewiſe his pleaſures, in raiſing himſelf above others, and in the flattering hope of a ſtill greater heighth, abſtracted from other gratifications. The man of virtue, that is, of true honour, has pleaſures, infinitely ſuperior to both, immediately and directly reſulting from the inward rectitude of his mind. But theſe are not the pleaſures we mean when we uſe the word by itſelf, in diſcourſe: but the idea which always goes along with it, is that of the pleaſures or gratifications of ſenſe, properly ſo called. And it is with regard to theſe peculiarly that I now ſpeak.

Having ſaid thus much to explain the term pleaſure; that we may form a judgment in what manner and degree it ſhould be purſued, I ſhall conſider the circumſtances and conſequences of the different conduct of men, in their purſuit and

enjoyment of this good: neither aggravating the unhappineſs of one ſort; nor exalting, more than is undeniably juſt, the happineſs of the other.

With regard to thoſe who have entered, without reaſon or moderation, into the field of pleaſure; none of them can deny, what too many know by conſcious and ſenſible experience, that there is a purſuit of pleaſure (of that I mean which muſt be allowed to be pleaſure) which, by natural conſequence, introduces a ſcene of pain and bodily uneaſineſs; as really pain, and much more laſting, as the pleaſure itſelf was pleaſure, which was the ſole cauſe of it.

Nor can it be denied that, in ſome caſes, the purſuit of pleaſure, made eager by the preſent ungoverned paſſions of the purſuer, is ſeen, in a little time, to lay waſte the very ſupport of pleaſure itſelf; and, by the exceſs of extravagance, to bring on ſuch temporal inconveniences, as change the ſcene entirely from a ſhort courſe of rioting in joy, to a long one of ſenſible grief and ſorrow, when he finds himſelf deprived of the very poſſibility of going on in the ſame path. For this muſt

muſt be the caſe of pleaſure, wherever paſſion will know no bounds; conſidering that the riches of the purſuer, though great as you pleaſe, upon this ſuppoſition, muſt be ſoon waſted to nothing.

But if ſuch immediate evils are, by a cautious prudence, avoided by ſome, it may ſtill be ſaid, that there is often ſeen, in their examples, a purſuit of pleaſure, founded upon a ſcheme of diſhonour; and this is always accompanied by uninterrupted cares; carried on with numberleſs anxieties; ſucceſsful perhaps for a length of time; but, when an end is put to it by any unlucky event, it is naturally followed by uneaſineſſes, which outweigh all the remembrance, and efface every image, of what was once thought pleaſure. For, before men have quite put off humanity, the reflection of a wounded ſpirit, and the regret of a ſenſible heart, are, in ſome caſes, ſuch effects of this purſuit, as change the ſweeteſt honey into the bittereſt gall; even in the minds of thoſe who think of this life only.

This is indeed, a purſuit of pleaſure, ſo unworthy of human nature, and ſo diſhonourable, in the eſtimation of the

generality of mankind, that, as ſhame for ever follows it, ſo muſt the fear of diſcovery always attend it. And this is a companion, alone ſufficient to deſtroy the very eſſence of pleaſure itſelf, in any mind not totally loſt to all generous ſentiments.

You may obſerve that I have not, in theſe inſtances, ſo much as mentioned any remorſe of mind, but that cauſed by the evil fruits of a too eager purſuit of pleaſure; nor any miſeries but thoſe of the preſent ſtate, introduced by it. But, as conſcience is reaſon itſelf, firſt guiding us, and then cenſuring us; as reaſon is the gift of God to all men, for their government; and pleaſure is his gracious law, for the good, and not for the ruin of his creatures; it is impoſſible that there ſhould not be a remorſe of another ſort, and an inward diſtreſs, in all well-formed minds, following upon ſuch purſuits of pleaſure as evidently are, contradictions to the will of that God who made us what we are, and placed us in this ſtate, ſurrounded with ſenſible objects; inſtances of the higheſt ingratitude to him,

who

who formed us capable of pleaſure; injuries to our neighbours, who have a title to our good offices; and, in ſome caſes, violations of the laws of ſociety, for which our Creator made us.

There are others who purſue and enjoy the ſame in a manner directly oppoſite to this, in every circumſtance and conſequence. The purſuit and enjoyment of pleaſure, under the conduct of reaſon and moderation, is undeniably ſuch as does not bring on a ſtate of bodily pain and indiſpoſition, as its natural or probable conſequence. It is ſuch a purſuit of pleaſure, as is free from that long train of fears and anxieties, which never fail to attend upon the contrary purſuit; unacquainted with any diſappointments but what the common condition of human life makes unavoidable; and undiſturbed with any remorſe on account of evils brought upon others, by a paſſionate regard to our own pleaſure only. It is ſuch a purſuit of pleaſure, as does not waſte or deſtroy that fortune which is neceſſary for the purpoſes of the moſt innocent enjoyments of life; and ſuch a purſuit, as carries no ſhame along with it, in the judgment of the

world about us. In a word, it is such a pursuit, as is a mark of gratitude to the giver of all our faculties of enjoying pleasure, and of all the pleasures about which they can at any time be conversant. And, being no violation of any one of his laws; no breach of the universal system of good and right; carrying with it no evil to the members of human society, or to the public; it cannot be the parent of any inward distress or anguish of mind; nor consequently end either in repentance here, or punishment hereafter.

Such are the different ways in which pleasure is pursued by different persons.

Now, it will not be difficult to determine, which method of pursuing it has the advantage, in point of pleasure itself. In stating this account, we must imitate the men of worldly business, in the method of stating their profit or loss, which they follow so as not to impose either upon others or themselves. If ever so many of the particular articles in their account are real profit, but yet have themselves been the occasions of loss or disadvantage, more than proportionable to it; the sum of such an account cannot

not be profit: and if the balance at the end be loſs; it is ſmall comfort to them, and little matter of boaſting, that there are in it particular articles of gain, and thoſe, perhaps, very conſiderable. It is from the total amount, that they judge: as that alone by which their condition in buſineſs muſt be determined.

And thus it muſt be in the caſe of pleaſure. Put down, if you pleaſe, all the gratification of ſenſe you can think of. Let them be magnified and ſwelled to as high a pitch, as an imagination devoted to them can conceive. But be juſt in not deceiving yourſelves. Put down, before you pretend to judge of the whole, all the pain of body and mind; the diſeaſes, the calamities, which were the reſult of them: the fears, and anxieties, and diſappointments, which attend them: the ruin, in ſome caſes, of fortune and eſtate; in ſome, of reputation and honour: in others, the laſting wound of remorſe, in the reflexion upon what, it may be, has produced miſeries, never to be retrieved, and never to be alleviated; and in all, the inward uneaſineſs natural to a reaſonable being, in every ſtep of life, which reaſon does not approve of.

of. Put into the account every known bad consequence under the notion of pain, the opposite of pleasure; and then it must stand thus. If the total amount of such a pursuit of pleasure, be really found as it must be, to be pain, of the several sorts before mentioned, naturally produced by it: and this more than sufficient to counter-balance every article of pleasure: the man of pleasure himself, to whom the name is now appropriated, the man who pretends to study and follow after pleasure as his great good, must be found, at last, not to understand what it is truly to enjoy pleasure; nay, frequently to destroy his own purposes, by shortening and ruining his own pleasures.

On the contrary, the man of virtue, who is also the man of true honour; who enjoys the pleasures of sense under those rules which make them sit perfectly easy upon his mind, his body, his estate, his reputation; must be acknowledged, on the whole, by the natural operation of virtue, and by the wisdom of God, in establishing the nature and relation of man, and all things around him, far to exceed the other at the close

of

of the account; and to triumph just as much over him, in pleasure itself, as he does in virtue, innocence, and honour. I say, on the whole; because, as I am free to acknowledge, on the one hand, there are pleasures, in the sense in which we now use the word, to the man of pleasure, which to the man of virtue are wholly unknown; yet, it is certainly true, that judgment must be made from the whole, and not from a part; and that, upon the final issue, it is undeniable that the man of virtue enjoys pleasure more sincere, that is, more free from the mixture of any of those pains and evils which are its natural consequences to others, and with much more security of continuing so to do, than the man of pleasure can pretend to. To which we may add this disagreeable circumstance, that the course of pleasure into which the voluptuary runs so precipitately, is first in time; and that the course of evils which are its produce, succeeds; and lasts often long after the whole scene of pleasure is vanished. And certainly it is less tolerable to human nature, to pass from pleasure to a state of pain, than to pass through a course of

pain

pain to a ſettled ſtate of pleaſure. To which we may add, that, as theſe two enhance one another, the pleaſure paſt muſt give the man a double ſenſe of that pain, which not only ſucceeds it, but is really owing to it.

The great teacher of pleaſure among the heathens, who had, with equal ſtupidity and impiety, baniſhed Providence out of the world, and took into his account this life only, ſaw plainly the importance of virtue, in order to the enjoyment of pleaſure itſelf. And though his doctrine, by unhappily placing the chief good of man in pleaſure, not ſtrictly explained, led his raſh followers into the moſt intemperate purſuits of their own unhappineſs under that notion; yet his example, and the temperance and command of paſſion, by which he enjoyed and prolonged his own pleaſures, were, indeed, a reproach to them who would not interpret his maxim by his own practice. I only mention this, to ſhew that even he who ſtudied pleaſure only, put the virtue of temperance, or the command of preſent appetite, into the very compoſition of pleaſure itſelf.

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The great miſtake then, amongſt the men of pleaſure, ſeems to lie in this, that they do not make pleaſure and happineſs two diſtinct conſiderations; or rather, that they never enquire after happineſs, but are only for ever ſeeking after particular inſtances of ſenſible pleaſure, and ready to fall in with every invitation to them. Whereas pleaſure and happineſs ſtand, even in common diſcourſe, for two ſuch different things, that no one, by a man of pleaſure underſtands you to mean a happy man; but rather a man who diſregards happineſs for the ſake of particular inſtances of pleaſure. For happineſs being a ſtate of mind, of a better and more fixed nature than the ſudden ſtarts and paſſions of mankind; it muſt follow, that, if the paſſionate purſuit of any real or imagined pleaſure break in upon that happineſs, which is proper to a being endued with reaſon to direct the conduct of his life; then, the man caſually and imperfectly enjoys pleaſure, without being in a ſtate of happineſs.

And from hence a moſt important truth flows, namely, that, if the total amount of the purſuit of ſenſible pleaſures

be

be not a ſettled ſtate of inward happineſs, but the contrary; the purſuit has been irregular and unworthy of a creature to whom God has given the capacity, and opportunity of enjoying ſuch pleaſures; and that theſe unreaſonable purſuers of this attracting appearance, have, by their paſſionate ungoverned love of pleaſure, ſhewn that they have no knowledge of what happineſs is; and are quite ſtrangers to their own greateſt good: and that others, who have obſerved the contrary rules in all their gratifications, have really enjoyed pleaſure itſelf in ſuch a manner, that it has not interrupted their happineſs; nay, that it has contributed to as good a ſtate of happineſs, as man can hope to attain in this preſent ſhort, uncertain life.

Thus have I been an advocate for pleaſure, as I at firſt promiſed; and not againſt it. I allow man as framed in the manner he is, by his creator, and placed in this ſtate, ſurrounded with objects ſuited to all his ſenſes, to be unavoidably, by his nature, and by the law of creation, which conſtituted the relations of things, a lover of pleaſure. My great point has been to ſhew you the true, and moſt laſting,

way

way of enjoying this good. And, if I have been ſpeaking to any purpoſe, the only good rule muſt be, to be virtuous, in order to enjoy pleaſure; at the firſt ſound, perhaps, to many ears, a ſurpriſing, dull, and unacceptable rule: but to thoſe who will give it but a few minutes conſideration, a certain truth; a rule demonſtrable, from nature and experience, to be a friend to pleaſure, by ennobling it; by extending it beyond the limits which ungoverned paſſion will ever confine it to; and by freeing it from thoſe mixtures of evil and pain, which the contrary rule will certainly bring upon it.

You ſee then, that, in the account of reaſon, which always conſiders all the circumſtances and mutual relations of things, the love of pleaſure is not in itſelf a crime; but, indeed, the law of God, who created man what he is, and placed him in ſuch a world as this; and is himſelf the author of that pleaſure, which neceſſarily reſults from his own works, and his own will. You will ſee, if you go a ſtep farther, that reaſon itſelf will ſupport the ſevere cenſure of the apoſtle in the text, fixed upon thoſe, not who

who are lovers of pleaſure (for he does not reſt his cenſure there) but who are "lovers of pleaſures more than lovers of God;" that is, who prefer the paſſionate purſuit of particular inſtances of pleaſure, before the regard due to the laws of that God, who is the great author of pleaſure itſelf, to whom they owe the very poſſibility of enjoying it.

We may therefore from hence infer, that they who purſue pleaſure in contradiction to the love of God, or to his diſhonour, are ungrateful to him who alone gave them this good, by being lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of God: that they who purſue it in any inſtances, in violation of the peace and rights of neighbourhood, are very bad members of ſociety, by being lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of their neighbours: and that they who purſue it to the hurt or ruin of their own honour, reputation, eſtate, health, and families, are unjuſt to their own intereſts, by being lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of themſelves, in that ſenſe in which they ought to be; expoſing themſelves, for the ſake of a preſent violent paſſion, to the loſs of every thing dear in this world; even

of

of all their own happineſs, which can never ſubſiſt, but under the direction of virtue.

To ſum up the whole; If we chuſe to conſider ourſelves as beings concerned chiefly in finding out and enjoying the pleaſures of this world only; it is moſt certainly true, that, in this view only, however the unexperienced may flatter themſelves, the courſe of pleaſure muſt, and will be limited by ſomething or other; and the wild purſuer muſt and will be ſtopped by ſome obſtacle or other, in his career. And whether any man will not be more eaſy and ſatisfied in the reflection that good reaſons, though of preſent concernment only, have prevented the utter ruin of his happineſs, by confining his pleaſures within the bounds of what is juſt and right, than in the thought of having left them to be totally ſtopped and deſtroyed, by the natural conſequences only of his own unreſtrained paſſions; let himſelf judge.

But, if we will be ſo juſt to ourſelves, as not to ſtop here; but to go on, as we ought, into a courſe of thought much more worthy of ſuch creatures as we are; if we would look farther into ourſelves, and

and conſider our own frames, and alſo the main deſign of our great maſter, Chriſt himſelf, in coming into the world; we could not but find ſtill plainer demonſtrations, that reaſon was given us to govern the love of pleaſure. For we ſhould very clearly ſee, that, as we have faculties adapted to ſenſible objects in this ſhort life; ſo we have others, of a higher nature, to govern them, which look forward, towards a better ſtate to come. That we are made with ſuch capacities, and ſuch powers, of reaſoning, reflexion, and judgment upon our own conduct, as will force us to acknowledge ourſelves capable of being called to a ſtrict account, and framed exactly as we ſhould have been, upon the ſuppoſition that ſo it will be: that, as it is perfectly agreeable to the reaſon of mankind to expect it, ſo our bleſſed Lord, by a plain declaration, ſufficiently atteſted by his reſurrection from the dead, has aſſured the world that ſuch a ſolemn day of account will come, in which the triumph will belong to thoſe, who have in this life kept the love of pleaſure in ſubjection to the love of virtue, and true happineſs; and ſhame and diſtreſs to thoſe,

who

who have been lovers of pleaſures more than lovers of God, their neighbours, or themſelves. And theſe will be ſuch arguments, as will ſet us above every allurement; and engage us ſteadfaſtly to follow that religious wiſdom, whoſe "ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all whoſe paths are peace:" and will certainly conduct us ſafe, through the ſhort deluſive ſcenes of pleaſure in this life, to real uninterrupted and laſting pleaſures, in the life to come. To which may God in his great mercy bring us all! Amen.

SERMON

SERMON X.

THE GOOD MAN'S SUPPORT UNDER AFFLICTIONS.

PSALM xxxiv. 19.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.

WHATEVER fine ſchemes of happineſs philoſophers have deſcribed, or we may have framed in our own imaginations, certain it is, that many afflictions often befal the beſt of men;

ſome, that are common to them with the reſt of mankind, and others, that are peculiar to perſons of this character. The righteous man, as well as others, may be deſerted by his friends, and abuſed by his enemies. Death may deprive him of thoſe, that were as dear to him as his own life, and ſwell his heart with the tendereſt ſorrow. His virtue will not infallibly ſecure him from infamy and contempt, from loſſes and diſappointments in his worldly affairs; from poverty, and the thouſand hardſhips that attend it, from bad health and painful diſtempers. If we deny, that theſe things are evils, we contradict nature and common ſenſe: if we condemn all thoſe as bad men, who have ſuffered ſuch things, we are guilty of an uncharitable and groundleſs preſumption. Even theſe rigid philoſophers, who refuſed to call adverſity and pain by the name of evils, gave them names no leſs, if not more formidable: they owned them to be "ſharp, grievous, contrary to nature, "hard to be endured;" ſtill they contended, they were not evils; that is, they differed from others in words, while they agreed with them in the ſenſe of things,

things, and ridiculouſly denied in one ſentence, what they affirmed in another.

No leſs abſurd would it be to conclude, that they, who ſuffer afflictions, cannot therefore be righteous men, though they ſeem to be ſo in outward appearance; thus we ſhould raſhly ſtrike out of the liſt of the virtuous, many that have the faireſt pretenſions to merit: for who can produce a better claim to integrity, than he, who has retained the appearance of it in difficult trials? What melancholy accidents have not ſometimes, nay often, befallen the moſt excellent perſons? Job, to whom God himſelf bore this teſtimony, that "he was a perfect and an upright man," was viſited with a complication of lamentable misfortunes; deprived by death of all his children; ſtripped of an affluent fortune, which it is much more grievous to have loſt, than never to have enjoyed; tormented with intolerable pains of body; inſulted with ſcorn and deriſion, by thoſe, who had before been maintained by his bounty; his friends, in the mean time, inſtead of comforting him, reproaching him as an hypocrite, and as a victim devoted to the

divine vengeance. Theſe, and the like evils fall upon the righteous and the wicked without diſtinction.

But virtue has other ſorrows, in a great meaſure peculiar to itſelf: for beſides his own private afflictions, the good man, through the tenderneſs of his heart, feels the calamities of his fellow-creatures, and ſhares in the manifold evils he ſees them ſuffer. The ſorrows of a friend, the dejection of the poor, the tears of the mourner, and the ſighs of the afflicted, which ſome can obſerve with great tranquillity, affect his ſoul with a deep concern. But nothing moves his compaſſion more, than the vices of mankind, which others often make the ſubject of their diverſion. When he obſerves men hurting themſelves and one another by their own follies, creating wretched diſorders in human ſociety, and even threatening it with ruin by the general corruption of their lives and manners; "in ſeeing and hearing his benevolent ſpirit is grieved from day to day with their unlawful deeds." He alſo ſecretly mourns his own imperfections. In this world, folly cleaves to all, in different degrees; but they, who have the largeſt ſhare of it,

it, have this comfort, that they can seldom find any in themselves; while such as have the least perceive it to their sorrow.

Lastly; Righteousness or virtue sometimes draws upon itself the hatred of bad men, with all the evils, they are able to inflict. Eminent worth, which outshines others, and makes them appear despicable and mean, provokes their envy, the most bitter and deadly of human passions. "Wrath, says Solo-"mon, is cruel; and anger is outrage-"ous: but who is able to stand before "envy?" Many a great and good man, it is certain, has fallen a sacrifice to it, merely on account of his distinguished merit. Besides, integrity may lead a man to oppose the wicked in their unjust and mischievous designs; and for this reason they will join themselves to such as envy him, and increase the number of his enemies. Nay, it is no uncommon thing for a good man to incur the general odium of a corrupt age. By declaring against the superstitious principles and evil customs of the times, he may irritate the multitude against him, whose passions being managed and heightened by the arts of

the crafty few, may carry them to ſeek and rejoice in his ruin. That virtue indeed, which is moderate, and riſeth not above the common pitch, is generally ſafe and popular enough; but they, who have dared to be ſingularly and eminently good, have met with ſevere trials of their conſtancy. How juſtly then may we deplore the condition of human life, where men are ſo often treated ill for deſerving well; where, while ſome are rewarded for their crimes, others are puniſhed for their virtues; and where ſuch as have nobly endeavoured to ſtem the tide of corruption, have been overwhelmed and loſt in the prevailing torrent! No villain, no murderer, has at any time been proſecuted with greater zeal, than ſome of the moſt excellent and godlike men, that ever appeared upon this earth: they have ſuffered not only detraction, calumny and ſcorn, but bonds, impriſonment, torture and death, from an ungrateful world, which was indebted to them for the moſt important ſervices. Socrates was poiſoned; Jeſus Chriſt was crucified and ſlain. Such, O God, has been the portion of thy ſons; ſuch

ſuch, O virtue, the fate of thy beſt and braveſt followers! Thus it appears, that the righteous are in this world expoſed to many great afflictions; to many, that are common to them with the reſt of mankind; to many, that are peculiar to themſelves, as being the fruits of their own integrity. Inſomuch that in all the catalogue of human evils, we cannot find one, from which virtue is perfectly ſecure, except only guilt and its natural conſequences.

The various calamities, that have befallen the innocent and good, have furniſhed an objection againſt the equity of providence, which deſerves to be conſidered. If God is juſt and good, he loves the righteous; and if he loves them, why does he ſuffer them to be viſited with ſuch heavy afflictions? Was he, like man, ignorant and weak, he might perhaps be excuſed upon one or both of theſe accounts; but he is neither unacquainted with their ſufferings, nor does he want power to ſave and deliver them; for he conſtantly obſerves all human affairs, and appoints to every man what condition he pleaſeth without the leaſt difficulty to himſelf. What ſhall we ſay

then? Has he no concern for the happineſs of good men? Does he regard alike the righteous and the wicked, ſince both we ſee under his government are involved in the ſame outward calamities? Such conſiderations have ſometimes perplexed thoſe who believe, and emboldened thoſe who deny, that the affairs of mankind are conducted by a wiſe and righteous providence. I ſhall therefore endeavour to vindicate the ways of heaven in this reſpect, and ſhew, that both the confidence of the profane, and the doubts of the pious, which ariſe, from hence, are without foundation.

If God permits afflictions to fall upon the righteous, it is not becauſe he has no diſtinguiſhing regard for them; but becauſe their ſufferings may anſwer many valuable purpoſes both to others and themſelves.

Firſt, I ſay, others may reap various advantages by obſerving the ſufferings of good men. By this means their virtues are more clearly diſplayed, and recommended with greater force to the imitation of mankind. Merit while attended with eaſe and proſperity, is ſcarcely diſcernible to mortal

tal eyes; at beſt it makes but a faint and doubtful appearance: never is its luſtre ſo evident, nor its form half ſo engaging, as when we view it through the medium of diſtreſs. How can a man's patience be known without adverſity? or his fortitude, except he has hardſhips to endure, and dangers to encounter? How can his piety become conſpicuous, if it coſt him nothing? or his integrity, if he has no temptation to be diſhoneſt? So long as virtue and worldly intereſt invite him to purſue the ſame road, it is ſcarcely poſſible we ſhould know for certain, which of them he follows, or whoſe voice he principally regards. But let the path divide; let integrity exhort him to go one way, and the world another; if he ſtill adheres to righteouſneſs, when it leads him directly to toil and ſuffering, men doubt no longer of the ſincerity of his goodneſs; and the approved reality and firmneſs of his virtue, which is confeſſed and admired by all, kindles in many a ſpirit of emulation.

Upon this point we might ſafely reſt the cauſe of providence; ſince it is plain the afflictions of the righteous tend to the

general good, which a juſt governor will always prefer to the intereſt of any individuals.

But we may further obſerve, "that "their afflictions often produce great ad- "vantages to the ſufferers themſelves." Among theſe, I am not afraid to mention the glory they derive from hence. For though a good man will not principally covet fame, yet human nature cannot be indifferent about it; and the proſpect of it may juſtly afford the wiſeſt and beſt a lively ſatisfaction. Suffering virtue at leaſt may ſurely be allowed to comfort itſelf with the foreſight of that veneration, which is wrongfully withheld from it when living; but which poſterity will pay with intereſt to its ſurviving memory. If then the proſpect of honour, immortal honour, is ſo juſtly agreeable to the human heart, it ſhould rather be eſteemed a favour, than an injury, when God gives the righteous an occaſion to ſignalize themſelves, by leading them to encounter dangers and evils. Human governors are commended, when they take care, that eminent worth ſhould be known and diſtinguiſhed; and ſhall we blame the governor of all, for conſulting

ing the glory of good men, and taking care, that their virtues ſhall be applauded, and their names revered throughout all generations.

Nor is it a ſmall advantage, that by means of their ſufferings the righteous may attain a comfortable aſſurance of their own conſtancy. As it is impoſſible for others, ſo it is not eaſy for us to know the ſtrength of our virtue, before it has been tried. While we enjoy wealth, and the reſpect of mankind, how can we be aſſured, we could bear manfully indigence and contempt? We wrong no man; but what ſhould we do, if we lay under ſome ſtrong and preſſing temptation? We are ſatisfied with the diſpoſals of providence now things go on according to our own wiſh; but ſhould we ſtill maintain a calm and pious temper, if it ſhould pleaſe God to viſit us with ſome great loſs or heavy affliction? We profeſs religion, when it is held in eſteem: but if piety were to become unfaſhionable, or expoſe us to perſecution, ſhould we not be ſo weak as to abandon it? With relation to ſuch things, modeſt and conſiderate men are apt to entertain ſome diffidence of themſelves; but when God has furniſhed them with opportunities of

trying their ſtrength, and they have found, that their virtue will ſtand the teſt of adverſity, they have good reaſon to lay aſide their doubts, and are guilty of no preſumption in taking to themſelves the ſatisfaction, which ſprings from a growing confidence in their own integrity.

Sometimes alſo adverſity is profitable to good men, as it helps to cure them of their remaining imperfections. God is concerned (if I may ſo ſpeak) to obſerve ſome little blemiſhes ſullying thoſe characters, which are in the main amiable in his eyes; he therefore viſits them with afflictions, which are adapted to poliſh their ſouls, and work them up to greater perfection. If he diſcerns in them ſome ſecret vanity, he humbles them by ſufferings. Are they too fond of outward enjoyments? He convinces them of its vanity, by depriving them of it. Are they ſo taken up with the overflowings of his goodneſs, as to be unmindful of the ſpring? He withdraws the ſtream, and thus recalls them to the inexhauſtible fountain of living waters. The ſovereign phyſician perfectly underſtands the diſorders of every ſoul, and applies

applies thoſe remedies, which, though painful in their operation, are moſt ſalutary in their effects. The bitter draughts he ſometimes adminiſters to good men, are therefore ſo far from betraying a want of regard for them, that they are themſelves proofs of his care for their intereſt. As good fathers correct their children out of kindneſs to them; ſo their heavenly father chaſtens the righteous, becauſe he loves them.

Afflictions are the diſcipline, by which God trains up his beloved children to higher degrees of virtue and perfection; he enures them to hardſhips that he may improve their conſtancy; and tries them with ſufferings, that by bearing often, they may learn to bear well the accidents of life. Strength of mind, as well as of body, is gained by exerciſe, and impaired through indolence. A continual enjoyment of eaſe and pleaſure, melts the ſoul, and makes it incapable of reſiſting the ſlighteſt impreſſions of pain; but repeated conflicts with fortune ſtrengthen its nerves, confirm its fortitude and patience, and enable it at length to conquer with eaſe the evils of mortality. Trees, that are expoſed to frequent blaſts,

blaſts, ſtrike deep root, and are not ſo eaſily overthrown, as thoſe, that grow ſecure from ſtorms, in ſome low valley: in like manner, minds that have been well exerciſed with the ſtorms of fortune, will ſtand much firmer againſt them, than ſuch as have enjoyed a perpetual calm.

He muſt be fooliſh indeed, who counts upon paſſing through this world without meeting with any misfortunes. There is therefore but one way of attaining to a ſtate of ſecurity; namely, that ſince we cannot hope to be exempted from afflictions, our hearts ſhould be prepared and fortified againſt them. Do you think thoſe happy and favoured of heaven, who are diſſolved in luxury and eaſe? Fatal indulgence! which diſarms and ſoftens the ſoul, and leaves it an eaſy prey to approaching diſtreſs. While their enemy is haſtening towards them, they loſe their ſtrength inſtead of increaſing it. Trouble, to which all men are born, will overtake us ſooner or later, and the longer it is delayed the leſs will they be qualified to bear it. But God deals more favourably with the righteous, when he ſeems to treat them with ſeverity; he hardens them with labour and pain, as a gene-

a general his ſoldiers: that being duly diſciplined for the warfare of life, they may collect more vigor, and go through the hardſhips of it with chearfulneſs; neither daunted by the appearance of danger, nor deſponding under the preſſure of calamity.

Providence therefore is fully vindicated with regard to the afflictions of good men, which we ſee are profitable, not only to mankind around them, but alſo to themſelves. Even in the preſent conſtitution of things, where the righteous are expoſed to ſo many ſufferings, God has not left them without diſtinguiſhing marks of his favour; having made virtue in the darkeſt circumſtances preferable to vice in thoſe we eſteem the beſt and moſt fortunate. The good man has indeed many afflictions as well as the ſinner. He has even ſome afflictions, which the ſinner eſcapes; but he eſcapes many evils, with which the ſinner is tormented. He has not the tumults of rage and luſt; he has not the repinings of envy; he has not the cares and anxieties of avarice; he has not the burning deſires and bitter diſappointments of ambition; and in avoiding intemperance he avoids a manifold

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and certain plague: he has not, in fine, that conſciouſneſs of guilt, which haunts the wicked breaſt, and fills it with dreadful apprehenſions; and which would far outweigh all the calamities of the brave and good, though earth and ſea were thrown with them into the ſame balance.

If the good man has many afflictions, he has alſo many ſubſtantial enjoyments. I dare not aſſure him, that he ſhall obtain wealth and honour, and eaſe and pleaſure. But I may venture to promiſe him the immediate enjoyment of much nobler ſatisfactions, in the peace and compoſure of his mind; in the conſciouſneſs of doing and deſerving well; in the calm and ſteady approbation of his own heart. Theſe are bleſſings peculiar to virtue, inſeparably connected with it by the eternal law of God and nature; of which it cannot be hindered or deprived: and which, whoever enjoys, cannot be miſerable, and whoever wants, cannot be happy.

Does the righteous ſuffer many afflictions? He has many powerful ſupports under them; Firſt: the native ſtrength of his virtue, which enables him to break their

their force by oppoſing to them a firm and conſtant mind. For, when ſufferings are borne with fortitude and patience, if they do not entirely loſe their nature as evils, it is certain they loſe much of their weight. The weak and puſilanimous, who voluntarily ſink under the preſſures of pain, would be quite oppreſſed by thoſe afflictions, which the good man exerting the ſtrength he derives from his virtue, can bear with chearfulneſs. Religion alſo lends him a powerful aid; his ſenſe of a preſent approving deity, the witneſs of his ſufferings and of his behaviour under them; his ſubmiſſion to heaven, which he is perſuaded, orders for the beſt all events, and ſuch as relate to himſelf in particular; his confidence in God, both living and dying; and his lively hope of immortal bleſſedneſs in a future ſtate, conſpire to ſuſtain his ſoul, and keep it erect and ſteady under the heavieſt burdens, that are laid upon him.

Thus notwithſtanding the calamities, which befal good men, we may find in this world plain traces of a due order and equitable providence. God has given ſtrong proofs of his regard for them; and

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the favour, he ſhews them here, affords a good preſumption, that he will not neglect their intereſt hereafter. Since he has conſulted their welfare in life, we may be aſſured he will not deſert them at death, but continue to exerciſe his providence in their behalf, through all the ſtages of their future being. Virtue, ſays a late excellent author, expoſed as ſhe is here, is not however abandoned or left miſerable; ſhe has enough to raiſe her above pity, though not above our wiſhes: and as happy as we ſee her here, we have room for further hopes in her behalf. Her preſent portion is ſufficient to ſhew, that providence is already engaged on her ſide; and ſince there is ſuch proviſion for her here, ſuch happineſs and ſuch advantages even in this life; how probable muſt it appear, that this providential care is extended yet further to a ſucceeding life, and perfected hereafter!

Theſe preſumptions concerning the happineſs of virtue in a future ſtate, which are made probable by reaſon, are aſcertained and confirmed beyond all doubt, by the goſpel. Here we are aſſured, that they, who have ſpent their lives in doing and ſuffering according to the

the will of God, ſhall be removed, when they die, into a ſtate of eternal peace and unſpeakable felicity. Death is a ſecure haven to the good man's ſoul; where as ſoon as he arrives (and ſhortly he muſt) God will put a final period to his troubles, and crown him with immortal glory and happineſs. Thus at the laſt he will deliver the righteous out of all his afflictions. Or, we may ſay with the Pſalmiſt, that he does deliver him now: either becauſe the joyful proſpect of the glorious event, makes him as it were inſenſible of preſent calamities; or becauſe the time of his deliverance is ſo near at hand, that it may be conſidered, as in a manner actually preſent. The ſum of all is this; that the righteous do indeed ſuffer in this world many afflictions; but that we have no reaſon to diſtruſt upon this account, either the equity of providence, or the wiſdom of being righteous.

SERMON

SERMON XI.

ON RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT.

MATTHEW xiv. 23.

When he had ſent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain, apart, to pray.

IT hath been diſputed, which is a ſtate of greater perfection, the ſocial, or the ſolitary; whereas, in truth, neither of theſe ſtates is complete without the other;

other; as the example of our bleſſed Lord (the unerring teſt and meaſure of perfection) informs us. His life, which ought to be the pattern of ours, was a mixture of contemplation and action, of auſterity and freedom: we find him often, where the greateſt concourſe was, in the market-places, in the ſynagogues, and at feſtival entertainments; and we find him alſo retiring from the crowd into a deſart, or a garden, and there employing himſelf in all kinds of religious exerciſe, and intercourſe with God, in faſting, meditation, and prayer. In imitation of his ſpotleſs example, we may, doubtleſs, lead public lives, innocently, and uſefully; converſing with men, and doing good to them; mutually ſowing, and reaping the ſeveral comforts and advantages of human ſociety. But becauſe the pleaſures of converſation, when too freely taſted, are intoxicating and dangerous; becauſe the temptations we there meet with are many and mighty; and even where the ſpirit is willing to reſiſt, yet the fleſh is often weak; we ought, therefore, to leſſen the too great complacence we are apt to have in ſuch ſatisfactions, by ſeaſonable intermiſſions of them;

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to ſtrengthen ourſelves for ſuch public encounters, by our religious privacies; to retire from the world ſometimes, and converſe with God, and our own conſciences; examining the ſtate, and fortifying the powers of our ſouls, in ſecrecy and ſilence. We muſt, as our Lord did, "ſend the multitude away, and go up "into the mountain, apart, to pray."

No man is, or ought to be ſo deeply immerſed in the affairs of this world, as not to be able to retire from them now and then into his cloſet, there to mind the concern of another. Every day of his life, early, or late, ſome moments he may and muſt find to beſtow this way; the Lord's day particularly is an opportunity of this kind, when every one, the noble and the mean, the wealthy and the poor, hath it certainly in his power, if it be but in his heart, to retire; to ſtep aſide from the hurry and vanities of life, and all the allurements of ſenſe, and to examine, and improve, and enjoy himſelf in private.

I ſhall, at this time, repreſent to you the ſeveral advantages attending this religious practice; whether we conſider it, as a means of effacing the ill impreſſions made

made on our minds in daily converſation, or as an opportunity of purſuing farther degrees of perfection, and abounding in all the methods of ſpiritual improvement.

The advantages of the firſt kind, which it affords us, are plainly ſuch as theſe; that it unites and fixes our ſcattered thoughts; places us out of the reach of the moſt dangerous temptations; frees us from the inſinuating contagion of ill examples, and huſhes and lays aſleep thoſe troubleſome paſſions, which are the great diſturbers of our repoſe and happineſs.

A diſſipation of thought is the natural and unavoidable effect of our converſing much in the world; where we cannot help ſquandering away a great deal of our time upon uſeleſs objects, of no true worth in themſelves, and of no real concern to us. We roll on in a circle of vain empty pleaſures, and are delivered over continually from one ſlight amuſement to another; ever ſeemingly very buſy, and ever really very idle; applying ourſelves without reſpite to that, which it becomes us moſt to neglect, and utterly neglecting that one thing neceſſary,

ſary, which it becomes and behoves us moſt to purſue. This gives us by degrees ſuch a levity and wantonneſs of ſpirit, as refuſes admittance to all ſerious thoughts, and renders us incapable of reflection; makes our cloſet a terrible place to us, and ſolitude a burthen. To retrieve ourſelves from this vain, uncertain, roving, diſtracted way of thinking and living, it is requiſite to retire frequently, and to converſe much with (what we above all things love, and yet above all things hate to converſe with) ourſelves; to inure our minds to recollection, to fix them on the greateſt and moſt concerning objects, thoſe which religion ſuggeſts, and which will, by their importance, deſerve, and engage, and command our attention; till the buſy ſwarm of vain images, that beſets us, be thoroughly diſperſed, and the ſeveral ſcattered rays of thought, by being thus collected together, do by little and little warm our frozen hearts, and at laſt produce a holy flame.

The expedience of retirement is yet greater, as it removes us out of the way of the moſt preſſing and powerful temptations that are incident to human nature.

We all know by experience, that theſe meet us moſt frequently, and affect us moſt ſtrongly in ſociety; where our ſenſes, the great inlets of temptation, are moſt awakened, and tempting objects, by their number and nearneſs, make the moſt vivid and laſting impreſſions upon us. Indeed, there is no place, no ſtate, or ſcene of life, that hath not its peculiar temptations; even ſolitude itſelf is not without them: but they are few, and faint, in compariſon with thoſe to which our appearance on the great ſtage of the world expoſes us; and whenever they attack us in our receſſes, they do, or may find us prepared, and upon our guard; we are then at leiſure to encounter them, and have helps near at hand, which, if made uſe of, will enable us to decline, or baffle them. Whereas, in public, we are merely paſſive to ſuch impreſſions; they ſtrike our minds ſo violently, and ſucceed each other ſo faſt, that we have no opportunity, no ſtrength, no inclination almoſt to withſtand them.

The great riſque which virtue runs in company, is, from the neighbourhood of ill examples, which are of ſo contagi-

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ous a nature, that, if we live much among them, we ſhall as ſurely be corrupted by them, as he that often breathes in foul air, will at laſt partake of the infection. It is dangerous for the moſt innocent perſon in the world to be too frequently and nearly a witneſs to the commiſſion of vice and folly. Such views leſſen the natural horror we have for ſuch actions; and render the thoughts of them more familiar, and leſs diſpleaſing to us. Eſpecially, when we are uſed to ſee ill things practiſed by perſons, whom we regard; the favourable opinion we have of the doer extends itſelf to the action done; and leads us inſenſibly from ſeeing to approving, and from approving to imitating. And thus being (the very beſt of us) prone to do evil, and living in the midſt of evil; being attacked thus from without, and betrayed from within; we are not capable of making an effectual reſiſtance: the only refuge, we have, is in retreat, where we may at leiſure correct the bad impreſſions that have been made upon us; and by diſtance weaken the force of thoſe ill influences which we could not wholly avoid.

Another advantage which retirement affords us, is, that it calms and compoſes all the paſſions; thoſe eſpecially of the tumultuous kind; which, while the buſineſs and pleaſures of life poſſeſs our hearts, are under a reſtleſs and violent agitation. We ſeldom mix long in converſation, without meeting with ſome accident that ruffles and diſturbs us; ſomewhat that plays either upon our hopes or our fears, our averſions or deſires. An injurious, or ſlighting word is thrown out, which we think ourſelves obliged to reſent; or ſome innocent expreſſion of ours is miſinterpreted and reſented by others, and that provokes a return. Our enemy comes in our way, and kindles thoughts of averſion and hatred in us; we look upon thoſe, who are above us in all the advantages of life, with envious eyes, and with contempt on thoſe who are beneath us. Thus are we delivered over from paſſion to paſſion, toſſed and diſquieted in our mind, during the intercourſe we maintain with the world. But when we quit it, and retire, all theſe winds are preſently laid, and there is a perfect calm. The objects, which engaged us, being removed, our

our appetites alſo languiſh and die away; we poſſeſs our ſouls in patience and peace, and enjoy a profound tranquility and reſt, the pleaſure of which is great to thoſe who are ſo happy as to have a reliſh for it; and is enchanced by being always taſted with innocence.

Wouldſt thou then be free from envy and ſcorn, from anger and ſtrife? fly from the occaſions of them; ſteal away from the great ſcene of paſſion and buſineſs into thy privacy, ſhut the doors about thee, "commune with thine own heart in thy chamber, and be ſtill." There all animoſities are forgotten, all purſuits, all competition ceaſe; there all marks of diſtinction are laid aſide; the great and the lowly, the prince and the ſubject are upon the level; equally under the eye of one common maſter, equally deſirous of pleaſing him, and unmindful of leſſer intereſts and concerns. There the vanities and vexations of this world are ſhut out, and the conſiderations of another are let in; and our ſoul enjoys that ſweet contentment and repoſe, which it enjoys no where elſe, on this ſide heaven.

I have hitherto conſidered the uſefulneſs of religious retreat, with reſpect to

ſome ill impreſſions made upon us in converſation, which it removes: I ſhall now conſider it, as productive of the chief chriſtian graces and virtues; in as much as it affords us the beſt opportunity of knowing God, and ourſelves, and of taking all the proper methods to reconcile and approve ourſelves to God, which are conſequent upon ſuch a knowledge: for, though it be expedient for every rank and order of men, yet it is more particularly advantageous to penitents, to go up with our Saviour into the mountain, apart, to pray.

It is our duty, and our privilege, our chief honour and happineſs, to be acquainted with God; and this acquaintance can never be made, but, where we diveſt ourſelves of all other acquaintance, in our cloſets. When we have called off our thoughts from worldly purſuits and engagements, then (and not till then) are we at liberty to fix them on the beſt, the moſt deſerving, and the moſt deſirable object, even upon God himſelf; to ſtudy his bleſſed nature and perfections, to imprint a filial awe of him on our hearts, a lively ſenſe of his perpetual inſpection and preſence; to abound in all the methods of devout

devout application to him, in acts of petition and praise, of joy and wonder, of submission and hope, of love and affiance; to open all our wants, and impart all our griefs to him, and to express in the most significant manner we are able, our entire and unlimited dependance upon him; till, by often dwelling on such thoughts and reflections as these, we have made them familiar, habitual, and natural to us; and can have as easy and delightful a recourse to God, in all accidents, and upon all occasions, as a son hath to a beloved and loving parent, who, he knows, is at all times able to assist, and ready to receive him: in a word, till we can look up to God, in each step of our conduct, as the supreme end and guide of all our actions, the fixed centre of all our wishes and desires; till we bring ourselves to love nothing in competition with him, nothing but in order to the enjoyment of him; and resolve to do nothing, and be nothing, but what we are sure will please him.

Can any thing refine, raise, or ennoble our natures more than such a conversation as this, which is thus begun, improved, and perfected in solitude? Shall

we not think it worth our while, to ceaſe for a time from cultivating uſeleſs and periſhing friendſhips with men, that we may be the more at leiſure, and the better qualified, to enter into this divine correſpondence, which is of the utmoſt concern to us, and upon which our everlaſting welfare depends?

Indeed while our hearts are deeply engaged in the concerns of this world, we cannot well reliſh the pleaſures of ſuch a ſpiritual intercourſe; but, after we have once accuſtomed and inured ourſelves to it, we ſhall find it the moſt delightful entertainment of which the mind of man is capable, pleaſing as light to the "eyes, ſweeter than honey and the honeycomb." Senſual men may ridicule ſuch a pretence, and call it enthuſiaſm, and the product of an heated imagination; but they that taſte the ſatisfaction, know it to be real, and would not part with it for all the delights this world can afford; and which (in the phraſe of the apoſtle) they count but as dung, compared with the excellency of this knowledge of God, and Chriſt Jeſus.

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As religious retirement is a great means of advancing us in the knowledge of God, ſo doth it aſſiſt us towards attaining a true knowledge of ourſelves; towards ſearching and trying our ways, and getting a right information concerning the ſtate of our conſciences. He that will thrive in his temporal affairs, muſt often balance his accounts, examine his gains, and his loſſes, and ſee what proportion they bear to each other; conſider, where his conduct may have been faulty in any reſpect, and how he may for the future rectify it. The ſame vigilance and care is requiſite in relation to our ſpiritual concerns alſo; and we can never exert it effectually but in the cloſet, where privacy and ſilence befriend our inquiries. When the importunity of outward objects ceaſes, when the noiſe and avocations of a troubleſome world are at a diſtance, we may enter upon theſe ſearches without difficulty, and finiſh them without interruption. We may then look inwards, and take a diſtinct view of what at other times paſſes there unobſerved; of our hidden inclinations and averſions, of the ſprings which ſecretly move us in all our purſuits, of

the temptations that beſet us hardeſt, and moſt frequently foil us, of the ground that we have loſt, or gained, in our ſeveral encounters. And when we are advanced thus far in the knowledge of ourſelves, and of our ruling ſins and infirmities, we have taken the moſt uſeful and neceſſary ſtep towards abounding in the three great duties of the penitent, contrition, reſolution, and prayer.

Contrition is a holy grief, excited by a lively ſenſe, not only of the puniſhment due to our guilt, but likewiſe of the infinite goodneſs of God, againſt which we have offended; accompanied with a deteſtation of our ſin, and of ourſelves, for the ſake of it. At this act of the mind repentance (properly ſpeaking) begins; and this godly concern of heart is rarely attained, and certainly can never be duly exerted, and improved, but in private. And, therefore, in the ſtory of St. Peter we may obſerve, that as ſoon as a conviction of his guilt had ſeized him, it is ſaid, that "he went out, and wept bitterly;" he withdrew into a ſecret place, where he might mourn his fall with freedom; where he might feed, and raiſe up to a due height the inward

inward anguiſh he felt, and indulge himſelf in all the expreſſions of ſincere ſorrow. The wounds of conſcience, like other wounds, though generally received in public, muſt always be healed in private: there they may be laid open and ſearched to the bottom, there the raging ſmart of them is beſt endured, and there ſuitable remedies are moſt eaſily, and moſt ſucceſsfully applied; where leiſure, and reſt, ſilence, and a proper diſcipline aſſiſt the patient, and promote the cure.

The next ſtep to contrition is, reſolution, or a firm immutable purpoſe of heart, never more to allow ourſelves in that tranſgreſſion, which we now lament, and deplore. And, in order to the forming ſuch a well-weighed and ſtable reſolution, there muſt be a calm and clear foreſight of the difficulties which may attend the execution of it, and a juſt computation of our own ſtrength to bear up againſt them. We muſt deliberately conſider, under what circumſtances the temptation, againſt which we are now arming ourſelves, hath beſet us hardeſt, and how, for the future, we may beſt decline them; what helps and

ſupports we have by experience found moſt uſeful, and how, in the day of trial, we may be ſecure of them; to what a broken diſpirited ſtate of mind we have already reduced ourſelves, by ſo often and lightly departing from what we had purpoſed; and, with how much greater difficulty, every time that we give way, we recover our ground. I need not prove to you, that theſe, and the like reflections, which are neceſſary towards our reſolving well and wiſely, can never be dwelt on, in all their due compaſs and force, but at leiſure, and in ſacred retirement. Doubtleſs, the good Pſalmiſt had been ſome time in his cloſet, and on his knees, when he uttered thoſe emphatical words; "I have ſworn, and am "ſtedfaſtly purpoſed, to keep thy right-"eous judgments."

But of all the duties of the penitent, that which privacy beſt qualifies us for, is prayer, which it enables us to perform in ſuch a manner, as is likely to be moſt prevalent and effectual. Great indeed is the excellence and advantage of public devotions, as they teſtify our common reverence for the Divine Being, as they are

are beſt fitted to implore, or to acknowledge public bleſſings, and as they excite a public emulation in the breaſts of ſincere worſhippers. However, in ſome reſpects, they muſt yield the pre-eminence to cloſet-prayer; particularly in this, that they are not ſo well calculated, to procure eaſe and repoſe of conſcience to the ſinner, and to adjuſt particular accounts between God and our ſouls. For it is of ſpecial uſe to this purpoſe, in theſe three reſpects; as it affords us the beſt opportunity of being fixed, fervent, and circumſtantial in our addreſſes to God.

When we pray in private we are placed immediately under the eye of God, which awes us; but under no other eyes, and in the neighbourhood of no other objects, which might divert or diſcompoſe us: we are at liberty to employ that part of our time in the performance of this ſervice, when we find ourſelves beſt diſpoſed for it; to make choice of our own thoughts, and our own words; ſuch, as are beſt ſuited to our preſent neceſſities, and deſires: and what is thus paſſing within ourſelves, we cannot but perceive, and attend to. We may break off

off from the duty, whenever we find our attention flags, and return to it at a more ſeaſonable opportunity.

Nor are we capable, at ſuch times, of being more fixed only, but likewiſe more fervent and inflamed. True religion is ever modeſt and reſerved in its demeanour, when it appears in public; jealous of doing any thing that may ſavour of vanity and oſtentation; unwilling to allow itſelf in any ſuch earneſtneſs of ſpeech, or ſingularity of behaviour, as may call off the eyes and ears of others to obſerve them: it contents itſelf, for the moſt part, with a compoſed and ſerious look, with a ſimple and unaffected carriage. But when public regards and reſtraints are taken off, the pious ſoul may then allow itſelf in the higheſt fervors of devotion, and in a ſuitable vehemence and warmth of expreſſion.

There is yet another great advantage that attends our private devotions; they give us leave to be as expreſs and particular as we pleaſe in our repreſentations. In the church, the ſinner and the ſaint, men of all ranks, diſtinctions, and attainments in virtue, muſt join in the ſame common forms: and though each of them

them may, by a ſudden glance of the mind, adapt the general words to his own circumſtances; yet one branch of the ſervice preſſes too faſt upon another, to admit of any pauſe between them. And they, therefore, who lie under the load of any particular guilt, riſe not from their knees with ſo much comfort, as they would have done, had they been at liberty to dwell upon it, and confeſs it in all its aggravations. This liberty their cloſet, and that alone, can afford them. There they may expatiate as much as they pleaſe upon their wants and unworthineſs: there they may pour out all their complaints to God, and lay open all their griefs and fears, and ſend up all their thanks and acknowledgements: there importunities are not forbidden, repetitions are not unbecoming; but they may perſiſt, knocking till it is opened to them, and aſking till they have obtained.

Theſe are ſome of the many ſpiritual advantages, which religious retirement, well employed, will be ſure to afford us. God grant that we may all thus employ it, as we have leiſure and opportunity. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM.

NUMBERS xxiii. 10.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my laſt end be like his.

THE occaſion of Balaam's coming out of his own country into the land of Moab, where he pronounced this ſolemn prayer or wiſh, he himſelf relates in the firſt parable or prophetic ſpeech, of which it is the concluſion. In which is

is a cuſtom referred to, proper to be taken notice of: that of devoting enemies to deſtruction, before the entrance upon a war with them. This cuſtom appears to have prevailed over a great part of the world; for we find it amongſt the moſt diſtant nations. The Romans had public officers, to whom it belonged as a ſtated part of their office. But there was ſomewhat more particular in the caſe now before us; Balaam being looked upon as an extraordinary perſon, whoſe bleſſing or curſe was thought to be always effectual.

In order to engage the reader's attention to this paſſage, the ſacred hiſtorian has enumerated the preparatory circumſtances, which are theſe. Balaam requires the king of Moab to build him ſeven altars, and to prepare him the ſame number of oxen and of rams. The ſacrifice being over, he retires alone to a ſolitude ſacred to theſe occaſions, there to wait the divine inſpiration or anſwer, for which the foregoing rites were the preparation. "And God met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth;" upon receiving which, he returns back to the altars; where was the king, who had all the

while

while attended the ſacrifice, as appointed; he and all the princes of Moab ſtanding, in eager expectation of the prophet's reply. "And he took up his parable "and ſaid, Balak the king of Moab hath "brought me from Aram, out of the "mountains of the eaſt; ſaying, come, "curſe me Jacob; and come, defy Iſrael. "How ſhall I curſe, whom God hath "not curſed? Or how ſhall I defy, "whom the Lord hath not defied? For "from the top of the rocks I ſee him, "and from the hills I behold him: lo, "the people ſhall dwell alone, and ſhall "not be reckoned among the nations. "Who can count the duſt of Jacob, and "the number of the fourth part of Iſrael? "Let me die the death of the righteous, "and let my laſt end be like his."

It is neceſſary, as you will ſee in the progreſs of this diſcourſe, particularly to obſerve what he underſtood by *righteous*. And he himſelf is introduced in the book of Micah as explaining it. "O my "people, remember now what Balak "king of Moab conſulted, and what "Balaam the ſon of Beor anſwered him "from Shittim unto Gilgal." Balak demands, "Wherewith ſhall I come before

"the

" the Lord, and bow myſelf before the " high God? Shall I come before him " with burnt-offerings, with calves of a " year old? Will the Lord be pleaſed " with thouſands of rams, or with ten " thouſands of rivers of oil? Shall I " give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, " the fruit of my body for the ſin of my " ſoul?" Balaam anſwers him; " He hath " ſhewed thee, O man, what is good: " and what doth the Lord require of thee, " but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, " and to walk humbly with thy God?" Here is a righteous man expreſsly characterized, as diſtinct from a diſhoneſt, and a ſuperſtitious man. No words can more ſtrongly exclude diſhoneſty and falſeneſs of heart, than "doing juſtice, and loving mercy:" and both theſe, as well as "walking humbly with God," are put in oppoſition to thoſe ceremonial methods of recommendation, which Balak hoped might have ſerved the turn. From hence appears what he meant by the righteous, whoſe death he deſires to die.

Whether it was his own character ſhall now be enquired: and in order to determine it, we muſt take a view of his whole behaviour upon this occaſion. When the

the elders of Moab came to him, though he appears to have been much allured with the rewards offered, yet he had ſuch a regard to the authority of God, as to keep the meſſengers in ſuſpenſe till he had conſulted his will. "And God ſaid "to him, thou ſhalt not go with them, "thou ſhalt not curſe the people, for "they are bleſſed." Upon this he diſmiſſes the ambaſſadors, with an abſolute refuſal of accompanying them back to their king. Thus far his regards to his duty prevailed, neither does there any thing appear as yet amiſs in his conduct. His anſwer being reported to the king of Moab, a more honourable embaſſy is immediately diſpatched, and greater rewards propoſed. Then the iniquity of his heart began to diſcloſe itſelf. A thoroughly honeſt man would without heſitation have repeated his former anſwer, that he could not be guilty of ſo infamous a proſtitution of the ſacred character with which he was inveſted, as in the name of a prophet to curſe thoſe whom he knew to be bleſſed. But inſtead of this, which was the only honeſt part in theſe circumſtances that lay before him, he deſires the princes of Moab to tarry that night with him

him alſo; and for the ſake of the reward deliberates, whether by ſome means or other he might not be able to curſe Iſrael; to do that, which had been before revealed to him to be contrary to the will of God, which yet he reſolves not to do without that permiſſion. Upon which, as when the Jewiſh nation afterwards rejected God from reigning over them, he gave them a king in his anger; in the ſame way, as appears from other parts of the narrative, he gives Balaam the permiſſion he deſired: for this is the moſt natural ſenſe of the words. Arriving in the territories of Moab, and being received with particular diſtinction by the king, and he repeating in perſon the promiſe of the rewards he had before made to him by his ambaſſadors: he ſeeks, the text ſays, by ſacrifices and enchantments, (what theſe were is not to our purpoſe) to obtain leave of God to curſe the people; keeping ſtill his reſolution, not to do it without that permiſſion: which not being able to obtain, he had ſuch regard to the command of God, as to keep this reſolution to the laſt. However, he goes on perſevering in his endeavour, after he had declared that "God had not be-

"held

"held iniquity in Jacob, nor perverse-"ness in Israel:" that is, they were a people of virtue and piety, so far as not to have drawn down by their iniquity, that curse which he was soliciting leave to pronounce upon them. So that the state of Balaam's mind was this: he wanted to do what he knew to be very wicked, and contrary to the express command of God; but he had inward checks and restraints, which he could not entirely get over; he therefore looks abroad for ways to reconcile this wickedness with his duty. How great a paradox soever this may appear, as it is indeed a contradiction in terms, it is the very account which the scripture gives us of him.

But there is a more surprising piece of iniquity yet behind. Not daring in his religious character as a prophet to assist the king of Moab, he considers whether there might not be found some other means of assisting him against that very people, whom he himself by the fear of God was restrained from cursing in words. One would not think it possible, that the weakness even of religious self-deceit in its utmost excess, could have so poor a distinction, so fond an evasion, to avail itself

itſelf of. But ſo it was: and he could think of no other method, than to betray the children of Iſrael to provoke his wrath, who was their only ſtrength and defence. The temptation which he pitched upon, was that concerning which Solomon afterwards obſerved, that it had "caſt down "many wounded; yea, many ſtrong men "had been ſlain by it:" and of which he himſelf was a ſad example, when "his wives turned away his heart from other gods." This ſucceeded: the people ſinned againſt God; and thus the prophet's counſel brought on them that deſtruction, which he could by no means be prevailed upon to aſſiſt by the religious ceremony of execration, which the king of Moab thought would of itſelf have effected it. Their crime and puniſhment are related in Deuteronomy, and in Numbers. And from the relation repeated in Numbers, it appears, that Balaam was the contriver of the whole matter. It is alſo aſcribed to him in the book of Revelation, where he is ſaid to "have taught Balak to caſt a ſtumbling-"block before the children of Iſrael."

This was the man, this Balaam, I ſay, was the man who deſired to "die the death

death of the righteous," and that his "laſt end might be like his:" and this was the ſtate of his mind, when he pronounced theſe words.

So that the object we have now before us is the moſt aſtoniſhing in the world: a very wicked man, under a deep ſenſe of God and religion, perſiſting ſtill in his wickedneſs, and preferring the wages of unrighteouſneſs, even when he had before him a lively view of death, that approaching period of his days, which ſhould deprive him of all thoſe advantages for which he was proſtituting himſelf; and likewiſe a proſpect, whether certain or uncertain, of a future ſtate of retribution: and all this joined with an explicit ardent wiſh, that when he was to leave this world, he might be in the condition of the righteous man. Good God, what inconſiſtency, what perplexity is here! with what different views of action, muſt ſuch a mind be torn and diſtracted! It was not unthinking careleſſneſs, by which he run on headlong in vice and folly, without ever making a ſtand to aſk himſelf what he was doing: no; he acted upon the cool motives of

intereſt and advantage. Neither was he totally hard and callous to impreſſions of religion, or entirely abandoned to wickedneſs; for he abſolutely refuſed to curſe Iſrael. When reaſon aſſumes her place, when he is convinced of his duty, when he owns and feels, and is actually under the influence of the divine authority; whilſt he is carrying on his views to the grave, the end of all temporal greatneſs; under this ſenſe of things, with the better character and more deſirable ſtate preſent full before him, in his thoughts, and in his wiſhes — voluntarily to chuſe the worſe! What frailty is here! And yet, ſtrange as this character may appear, it is not altogether an uncommon one: nay, with ſome ſmall alterations, and put a little lower, it is applicable to a very conſiderable part of the world. For, if the reaſonable choice be ſeen and acknowledged, and yet men make the unreaſonable one, is not this the ſame contradiction, the very inconſiſtency which appeared ſo unaccountable?

No good reaſon can be aſſigned why men are ſo ſtrongly attached to the preſent world. Their hopes and fears and purſuits

ſuits are in degree beyond all proportion to the known value of the things they reſpect. This may be ſaid without taking into conſideration religion and a future ſtate; and when theſe are conſidered, the diſproportion is infinitely heightened. Now when men go againſt their reaſon, and counteract a more important intereſt at a diſtance, for one nearer, though of leſs conſideration; if this be the whole of the caſe, all that can be ſaid is, that ſtrong paſſions, or ſome kind of impulſe within, prevails over the principle of reaſon. However, if this be with a clear, full, and diſtinct view of the truth of things, then it is doing the utmoſt violence to themſelves, acting in the moſt palpable contradiction to their very nature. But if there be any ſuch thing in mankind, as putting a deceit upon themſelves; which there plainly is, either by avoiding reflection, or, if they do reflect, by equivocations, ſubterfuges, and palliating matters to themſelves; by theſe means conſcience may be laid aſleep, and they may go on in a courſe of wickedneſs with leſs diſturbance. All the various turns, doubles and intricacies in

a diſhoneſt heart, cannot be unfolded or laid open; but that there is ſomewhat of that kind is manifeſt, whether it be called ſelf-deceit, or by any other name. Balaam had before his eyes the authority of God, abſolutely forbidding him what he, for the ſake of a reward, had the ſtrongeſt inclination to: he was likewiſe in a ſtate of mind ſober enough to conſider death and his laſt end: by theſe conſiderations he was reſtrained, firſt from going to the king of Moab, and after he did go, from curſing Iſrael. But notwithſtanding this, there was great wickedneſs in his heart. He could not forego the rewards of unrighteouſneſs: he therefore firſt ſeeks for indulgencies; and when theſe could not be obtained, he ſins againſt the whole meaning, end and deſign of the prohibition, which no conſideration in the world could prevail with him to go againſt the letter of. And ſurely that impious counſel, he gave to Balak againſt the children of Iſrael, was, conſidered in itſelf, a greater piece of wickedneſs, than if he had curſed them in words.

If it be inquired what his ſituation, his

his hopes and fears were, in reſpect to this his wiſh: the anſwer muſt be, that a conſciouſneſs of the wickedneſs of his heart muſt neceſſarily have deſtroyed all ſettled hopes of dying the death of the righteous: he could have no calm ſatisfaction in the view of his laſt end: yet, on the other hand, it is poſſible that thoſe partial regards to his duty, now mentioned, might keep him from utter deſpair.

Upon the whole, it is manifeſt that Balaam had the moſt juſt and true notions of God and religion; as appears partly from the original ſtory itſelf, and more plainly from the paſſage in Micah; where he explains religion as conſiſting in real virtue and real piety, expreſsly diſtinguiſhed from ſuperſtition, and in terms which moſt ſtrongly exclude diſhoneſty and falſeneſs of heart. Yet you ſee his behaviour: he ſeeks indulgencies for plain wickedneſs; which not being able to obtain, he gloſſes over that ſame wickedneſs, and dreſſes it up in a new form, in order to make it paſs off more eaſily with himſelf. That is, he deliberately contrives to deceive and impoſe upon himſelf,

ſelf, in a matter which he knew to be of the utmoſt importance.

To bring theſe obſervations home to ourſelves. It is too evident that many perſons allow themſelves in very unjuſtifiable courſes, who yet make great pretences to religion—not to deceive the world (none can be ſo weak as to think this will paſs in our age) but from principles, hopes, and fears, reſpecting God and a future ſtate; and go on thus with a ſort of tranquillity and quiet of mind. This cannot be upon a thorough conſideration, and full reſolution, that the pleaſures and advantages they propoſe are to be purſued at all hazards, againſt the law of God, and though everlaſting deſtruction is to be the conſequence. This would be doing too great violence to themſelves. No, they are for making a compoſition with the Almighty. Some of his commands they will obey: but as to others, they will make all the atonement in their power; the ambitious, the covetous, the diſſolute man, each in a way which ſhall not contradict his reſpective purſuit. Indulgencies before, which was Balaam's firſt attempt, though he was not ſo ſucceſsful in

in it as to deceive himſelf, or atonements afterwards, are all the ſame. And here perhaps come in faint hopes that they may, and half-reſolves that they will, one time or other, make a change.

Beſides theſe, there are alſo perſons, who, from a more juſt way of conſidering things, ſee the infinite abſurdity of this, of ſubſtituting ſacrifices inſtead of obedience; there are perſons far enough from ſuperſtition, and not without ſome real ſenſe of God and religion upon their minds; who yet are guilty of moſt unjuſtifiable practices, and perſevere in them with great coolneſs and command over themſelves. In theſe, the ſame diſhoneſty and unſoundneſs of heart diſcovers itſelf another way. In all ordinary caſes we ſee intuitively at firſt view what is our duty, what is the honeſt part. This is the ground of the obſervation, that the firſt thought is often the beſt. In theſe caſes doubt and deliberation is itſelf diſhoneſty; as it was in Balaam upon the ſecond meſſage. That which is called conſidering what is our duty in a particular caſe, is very often nothing but endeavouring to explain it away. Thus thoſe courſes, which, if men would fairly attend to the

dictates of their own consciences, they would see to be corruption, excess, oppression, and uncharitableness, are refined upon: it is pleaded that the case was particularly circumstanced: great difficulties are raised about fixing bounds and degrees: and thus scope is given for an unfair mind to explain away every moral obligation. Whether men reflect again upon this internal management and artifice, and how explicit they are with themselves, is another question. There are many operations of the mind, many things pass within, which we never reflect upon again; which a by-stander, from having frequent opportunities of observing us and our conduct, may make shrewd guesses at.

That great numbers do in this manner deceive themselves, is certain. There is scarcely a man in the world, who has entirely got over all regards, hopes and fears, concerning God and a future state; and these apprehensions in the generality, bad as we are, prevail in considerable degrees: yet men will and can be wicked with calmness and thought; we see they are. There must therefore be some method

thod of making it ſit a little eaſy upon their minds; which, in the ſuperſtitious, is thoſe indulgencies and atonements before-mentioned, and the ſelf-deceit of this latter kind in perſons of another character. And both theſe proceed from a certain unfairneſs of mind, a peculiar inward diſhoneſty; the direct contrary to that ſimplicity which our Saviour recommends, under the notion of "becoming like unto little children," as a neceſſary qualification for our entering into the kingdom of heaven.

But to conclude: how much ſoever men differ in the courſe of life they prefer, and in their ways of palliating and excuſing their vices to themſelves; yet all agree in this one thing, deſiring to "die the death of the righteous." This is ſurely remarkable. The obſervation may be extended further, and put thus: even without determining what that is which we call guilt or innocence, there is no man but would chuſe, after having had the pleaſure or advantage of a vitious action, to be free from the guilt of it, and to be in the ſtate of an innocent man. This ſhews at leaſt the diſturbance, and implicit diſſatisfaction there is in vice. If

we inquire into the grounds of it, we ſhall find it proceeds partly from an immediate ſenſe of having done evil; and partly from an apprehenſion, that this inward ſenſe will hereafter be ſeconded by a higher judgment, upon which our whole being depends. And to ſuſpend and drown this ſenſe, and theſe apprehenſions, by the hurry of buſineſs or of pleaſure, or by ſuperſtition, or moral equivocations, can make no alteration at all in the nature of our caſe. Things and actions are what they are, and the conſequences of them will be what they will be. Why then ſhould we deſire to be deceived? As we are reaſonable creatures, and have any regard to ourſelves, we ought to lay theſe things plainly and honeſtly before our minds, and to make that choice, and prefer that courſe of life, which we can juſtify to ourſelves, and which will ſit moſt eaſily upon our conſciences. If we do this it will immediately appear that vice cannot be the happineſs, but muſt upon the whole be the miſery of ſuch a creature as man: and the reſult of the whole will be a ſteadfaſt purpoſe and habitual endea-

endeavours to "keep innocency, and "take heed unto the thing that is right; from a full conviction that this alone "will bring a man peace at the laſt."

SERMON XIII.

ON THE PLEASURES OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs; and all her paths are peace.

THESE words are part of Solomon's deſcription of the advantages of wiſdom, or true religion, which, contrary to the general method of this book (compoſed for the moſt part of independent ſentences)

tences) he purſues in a connected diſcourſe. He begins the chapter with recommending a ſtrict regard to the rules of virtue from this conſideration, that it is the moſt likely way to ſecure eſteem and influence, and a long, happy, honourable life. The ſame argument is reſumed at the 13th verſe; and the whole is wrought up with ſo much beauty and elegance, that I chuſe to give it in the language of the wiſe author himſelf. "Happy is the "man that findeth wiſdom, and the man "that getteth underſtanding. For the "merchandiſe of it is better than the "merchandiſe of ſilver, and the gain "thereof than fine gold. She is more "precious than rubies; and all the things "thou canſt deſire are not to be com-"pared unto her. Length of days is in "her right hand, and in her left hand "riches and honour. Her ways are ways "of pleaſantneſs; and all her paths are "peace." I ſhall only add by way of introduction, that if the argument from pleaſure appears to be on the ſide of religion, it may be hoped its efficacy will be univerſal; ſince a deſire of happineſs is an inextinguiſhable principle in human nature, and one of the moſt powerful motives,

motives, by which the bulk of mankind are determined.

In the following diſcourſe, I ſhall premiſe a few things, very briefly, for explaining and illuſtrating the obſervation contained in the text. And then, which is the chief part of my deſign, proceed to ſhow the peculiar excellency of the pleaſures of religion and virtue.

The firſt thing that I would premiſe is, that what is here ſaid of the pleaſures of religion ſuppoſes that perſons are, in ſome degree, inured to the practice of it, and have a virtuous diſpoſition and turn of mind: for without this, there can be no more reliſh of divine and moral pleaſures, than of animal gratifications without the ſenſes. Every pleaſure muſt have its faculty of perceiving, ſuited and adapted to it. And therefore to thoſe who have led a diſſolute irregular life, the ways of religion are at firſt ungrateful and burthenſome; becauſe they not only oppoſe the current of the animal paſſions, but ſtubborn and inveterate habits; and ſo oblige them to offer, for ſome time at leaſt, a kind of violence to nature. But when corrupt appetites are ſubdued, vicious prejudices removed, and

contrary

contrary principles, fixed within us, then religion is eaſy, and the duties of it are delightful.

In interpreting Solomon's obſervation we muſt except extraordinary caſes; as we are obliged to do with reſpect to many other general propoſitions, which are only ſuppoſed to hold true in the common courſe of things. The caſe, for example, of violent perſecution; an evil indeed, that, upon the whole, happens but ſeldom, and may be avoided in part, even when a ſpirit of oppreſſion prevails, by a diſcreet and moderate behaviour; the caſe, I ſay, of violent perſecution muſt be particularly excepted; which may, in a great meaſure, deſtroy the natural advantages reſulting from the practice of virtue. However it cannot be denied, that a very conſiderable pleaſure will ariſe from acting a brave and ſteady part, and adhering inflexibly to our duty under the bittereſt reproaches and ſufferings; and the inward ſhame and uneaſineſs, which a man of a generous temper muſt feel, on cowardly deſerting the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs, may equal, and ſometimes, perhaps, exceed the inconveniencies that the good man

man labours under, and bears with a patient, firm, unſhaken mind, in maintaining of his integrity.

Finally, we are to underſtand the words of the text, not as ſpeaking of what is always fact, but of the direct and natural tendency of things. The pleaſures of religion may be deſtroyed by dark and gloomy notions of it, or by the influence of a melancholy habit: but when there is nothing in men's particular complection, inclining them to ſpleen and dejectedneſs, nothing in their ſcheme of religion, that leads to ſuperſtitious rigour and ſeverity, when its duties are rightly underſtood, and carefully practiſed, the genuine effect of it is inward compoſure and ſatisfaction: "Her ways "are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her "paths are peace."

Theſe neceſſary rules for underſtanding the text being premiſed, I proceed to ſhow the peculiar excellency of the pleaſures of religion and virtue; that they are the higheſt which mankind are capable of; have every thing in them that can recommend any pleaſures to the purſuit of rational beings; and have infinitely

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the advantage, in many reſpects, over all other enjoyments whatſoever.

This I take to be the moſt neceſſary part of a diſcourſe on this ſubject; and the only conſideration that is likely to reclaim thoſe, whoſe judgments are perverted and darkened by a long indulgence of irregular affections. Even ſuch perſons, who are unhappily enſlaved to vice, will, I ſuppoſe, make no ſcruple of allowing that there may be pleaſures in a religious life, and the ſtrict practice of virtue, where there is a proper diſpoſition of mind to reliſh them; nay, moreover, that where this is the particular turn, they may afford a much more agreeable entertainment than any other purſuit of a different kind. But then they will be apt to plead, that men's pleaſures are as various as their inclinations and tempers, and the prevailing principles by which they are influenced; and, of conſequence, as they find in themſelves a contrary taſte, whether it be from nature, or cuſtom, the happineſs that is moſt ſuitable for them muſt lie quite another way; that they have no notion of any greater or more deſirable pleaſures, than what they already enjoy; and that it is unreaſonable

ſonable to expect they ſhould give up thoſe delights, which they have always been uſed to, and know the ſweetneſs and value of, for others which they never experienced, and perhaps ſhall never bring themſelves thoroughly to approve; nay, which, for ought they know, may have no real foundation in nature, but ſpring entirely from a particular warmth of enthuſiaſm, of which few perſons are capable.

What method now muſt we take to convince ſuch men of the weakneſs and ſophiſtry of their reaſonings, and that they miſerably deceive and impoſe upon themſelves? Will it be ſufficient to tell them barely, that there are pleaſures in the practice of religion and virtue? To this they will anſwer, that there are pleaſures likewiſe in the purſuits of ambition and ſenſuality. The only way therefore that we can follow is to ſhew, that there is, in nature, a difference between the ſeveral pleaſures to which mankind are addicted; that their particular ſentiments, prejudices, affections and habits do not deſtroy, or in reality at all leſſen, this neceſſary difference; and that the ſuperiority on all accounts, whether it be in

reſpect

reſpect of purity, ſolidity, duration, or any other circumſtance that can help to furniſh out the moſt compleat ſatisfaction, is on the ſide of the pleaſures of the virtuous man. And this I ſhall attempt to do in the remaining part of my diſcourſe; and hope, that though I muſt be obliged, by reducing this noble ſubject, which can hardly be exhauſted, within ſo narrow a compaſs, to treat of it partially and imperfectly, ſufficient hints may however be ſuggeſted, to recommend a religious life not only to the graver and more conſiderate, but even to thoſe who are of a gayer turn, and have no eſteem for any thing but as it contributes to their pleaſures.

I might begin with this, that the pleaſures of religion are manly, that is, they are the exerciſe of our nobleſt faculties, and alone ſuited to the diſtinguiſhing capacities of human nature. Indeed it muſt be owned, that ſenſitive gratifications are agreeable to one part of our frame, in which there are ſtrong appetites, plant ed by the all-wiſe creator himſelf, that demand ſuch gratifications; and conſequently they may, within certain bounds, be innocently and regularly indulged.

But

But the indulgencies of ſenſe are not the peculiar pleaſures of a man, and have nothing at all to do with his nobleſt, his moſt diſtinguiſhing faculties: they are not indeed unworthy of human nature in its ſtate of minority; but may as properly be called brutal, as manly pleaſures. On the contrary, the pleaſures of which we are capable by means of our rational nature, are of an abſolutely different kind: they are the pleaſures of piety, juſtice, gratitude, benevolence, and a regular ſelf-government: theſe therefore moſt naturally and ſtrictly belong to us as men, and, of conſequence, muſt be our ſupreme entertainment and delight. But perhaps it will have little influence, againſt ſtrong prejudice and habit on the ſide of vice, to ſhew that the pleaſures of religion are manly, and argue their ſuperior excellency from thence; I ſhall therefore endeavour to prove that they are, in their own nature, preferable to all other enjoyments. And,

Firſt; The pleaſures of virtue ſuppoſe all thoſe unruly paſſions to be ſubdued, or, at leaſt, controuled and moderated, which are the cauſe of the greateſt diſorders and miſeries in human life; all the

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ſenſual paſſions to be corrected, and kept within their juſt limits, that they may neither impair our health, corrupt and debaſe our minds, or injure our fellow-creatures; all the diſorderly motions of pride and envy ſuppreſſed; and the violent tranſports of anger and revenge checked and reſtrained: in ſhort, every thing calm and ſerene, every affection and appetite obedient to the ſtill dictates of reaſon, and conſequently, creating neither diſturbance within, nor confuſion without. The right government of the paſſions is an important and eſſential branch of virtue, and one of the chief pleaſures that attend the practice of it: for beſides the numberleſs vexations and inquietudes which it prevents, it is a ſedate, uniform, ſelf-enjoyment, for the want of which no affluence of outward proſperity, no ſplendor of greatneſs, no ſtarts and flaſhes of pleaſure, no ſhort-lived extaſies, can compenſate. Thus compoſed are the pleaſures of religion. But can the ſame be ſaid of any other pleaſures? Far from it. To inſtance only in ſenſual indulgencies; while a man is the moſt eager in the purſuit of them, he may pine away with envy, be toſſed and agitated by furious reſentments, or racked

racked with the torments of disappointed ambition. Nay, they will not so much as remove the uneasiness arising from the particular appetites to which they are immediately adapted; but as, before enjoyment, they are restless and violent, by frequent gratification they become more inflamed and insatiable.

It is another excellent property of the pleasures of religion and virtue, that they will bear the strictest review, and improve upon reflection. Let a man examine, ever so carefully, the pleasures he feels on having faithfully discharged his duty to God, and practised that reverence and submission, that love and gratitude, which are immutably due, from all rational beings, to the father of the universe, the eternal and inexhaustible fountain of good; the pleasures of impartial justice, and generous, diffusive benevolence; or those that spring from temperance and chastity, keeping all his passions under strict government, and denying himself every irregular gratification, however agreeable to his warmest and strongest inclinations: let him examine these pleasures, I say, ever so carefully, and they will all appear to be worthy of his most excellent faculties,

culties, the dignity and refinement of his nature. He will find himſelf ſo conſtituted, that it is impoſſible for him to avoid being delighted with the review of ſuch a regular, honourable, and amiable conduct; and there is nothing but a ſenſe of his defects, and not having cultivated theſe virtues in a higher degree, that can give the leaſt check to his inward ſatisfaction. Every new reflection is a repetition of the pleaſure.

But the enjoyments of ſenſe, if purſued with the utmoſt prudence and moderation, will be found to be, at beſt, but innocent. There is nothing in them that ſhews the excellency of our conſtitution, above that of the creatures below us; and, conſequently, it is not in their nature to yield that generous and ſublime delight, that ariſes from the exerciſes of pi- and virtue. Nay there is, really, ſomething mortifying that attends a juſt eſtimate and conſideration of them; as they diſcover to us the weakneſs and imperfection of our preſent frame, and the diſorders to which it is liable. For by means of that very animal compoſition, which renders us capable of enjoyments of this kind, we are ſubject to innumerable

ble inconveniencies; not only to ungoverned paſſions, and the fatal extravagancies that they continually produce, but to dejected ſpirits, confuſed and melancholy thoughts, ſickneſs, pain, and all the evils of mortality. And if the indulgencies of ſenſe, even when they are moſt regular, yield ſo little comfort on a review, and are rather a humbling conſideration, than a ſource of real ſatisfaction to the mind; in what a diſagreeable light muſt the exceſſes of luxury and vicious pleaſure appear, upon cool and impartial reflection? Theſe, the natural conſequences of which, where there is not a hardened inſenſible temper, are nothing but confuſion, ſhame and remorſe, cannot bear a compariſon with the rational pleaſures of religion, which, the more they are conſidered, muſt be the more thoroughly approved. Religious pleaſures are, of all others, the moſt pure and unmixed, not interrupted in the enjoyment with diſquieting ſuſpicions, nor ſucceeded by uneaſy terrors. And this is one of their nobleſt and moſt recommending properties; a property that can never belong to any enjoyments, however for the moment they laſt tranſport-

ing, however applauded and admired, that reaſon condemns. And nothing can more fully demonſtrate the folly of ſuch irregular indulgencies than this, that it is abſolutely impoſſible for any man to be happy, whoſe favourite gratifications leave a ſting behind them, who is aſhamed of his conduct, and at variance with himſelf.

The pleaſures of religion moreover depend entirely on ourſelves, and not on thoſe numberleſs accidents, which may either prevent, or blaſt, or entirely deſtroy all outward pleaſures: not on the ſenſes which may loſe their quickneſs; not on the animal paſſions, which may grow faint and languid; not on the return of an over-loaded and jaded appetite; not on mutual agreement and confederacy; not on critical ſeaſons, and ſpecial opportunities; nor on the jealouſies, paſſions, and oppoſite intereſts of our fellow-creatures. Theſe things have almoſt the ſole influence in forming, and diſpoſing of the pleaſures of the ambitious and the ſenſualiſt; but thoſe that ſpring from virtue are free and independent: being ſeated in the mind, they may be enjoyed in their greateſt refinement when the body decays

decays, and the edge of all its appetites is blunted. The malice and power of the moſt formidable oppreſſors, who may take from us all the outward accommodations of life, cannot deprive us of them. They forſake us not even in ſolitude: but if we were baniſhed the ſociety of all mankind, a conſciouſneſs of our integrity, while we converſed in the world, and the reflection on the ſimplicity and rectitude of our manners, would furniſh out a great and noble entertainment. And as the pleaſures of a good life depend intirely on ourſelves, it is in our power to be always increaſing them by a greater proficiency in virtue; whereas thoſe of ſenſe are according to fixed and ſtated laws of nature, by us unalterable. We may, indeed, animate and raiſe our imaginations, and promiſe ourſelves, beforehand, extraordinary ſcenes of delight; but with all our art can do but little, if any thing at all, to heighten the actual enjoyment.

Again, another very conſiderable recommendation of the pleaſures of religion is, that they can never be purſued to an exceſs: never beyond the moſt deliberate dictates of reaſon; never to bring

a juſt reproach upon ourſelves, or to the injury of others. On the contrary, the more we are employed in theſe pleaſures, and, conſequently, in cultivating the ſolid principles of virtue, on which they are founded, the more ſhall we enoble and exalt our nature, and be more extenſively uſeful to mankind. But the exceſſes of other kinds of pleaſure are often immediately fatal, and fill the world with confuſion and miſery. They impair health, conſume the ſubſtance, bring infamy upon the character, introduce moſt deplorable diſtreſs into families, and violate the general peace and order of human ſociety. Inſtead of enlarging the mind, and inſpiring ſentiments of generoſity, their natural effect is to enervate and ſoften it, and render it unfit for all that is great and manly. In ſhort, they are, in this particular, quite the reverſe of the pleaſures of religion, that in every inſtance the greateſt difficulty is, to prevent their being carried to an exceſs; for without great prudence, care, and reſolution, they will infallibly be attended with moſt pernicious conſequences, and hurry us on to very fatal extremes.

Farther;

Farther; Religious pleaſures are our beſt, our only ſupport, under the diſappointments and calamities of life. There are leſſer cares, which a perſon may poſſibly divert, at leaſt in ſome degree, by a courſe of intemperance and luxury; by conſtantly inflaming his paſſions, and doing his utmoſt to keep reaſon aſleep: but this is not ſo much the patience and firmneſs of a man, as the ſtupidity of a brute. And after all, as inſenſible as the ſinner may appear to be in the midſt of his affected gaiety, his mind may be confuſed, and an utter ſtranger to a ſettled chearfulneſs and peace: or, however there are ſome circumſtances, in which all outward comforts muſt fail him, and leave him quite deſtitute of relief. Let us ſuppoſe, for inſtance, that he labours under decays of nature, or is tormented with acute pains, or under the immediate apprehenſions of death; in ſuch a condition as this, when he is altogether incapable of any of thoſe ſenſual gratifications, which he has always purſued as the ſum of his felicity, will the remembrance of paſt pleaſures refreſh and bear up his ſpirits? Quite the contrary. They muſt appear, at beſt, to be inſignificant,

and trifling; and it is natural to expect, that a review of the guilty ſcene will alarm, and fill him with horror, and render his other miſeries more heavy and inſupportable.

But the good man, who has acted as became him, and ſteadily adhered to the rules of virtue and religion, has in all ſuch critical ſeaſons of diſtreſs, a ſolid and ſubſtantial ſupport. The integrity of his heart will keep him from ſinking. The perfect reſignation of his mind to providence will prevent his being ruffled and diſcompoſed. Nay, his pleaſures will not deſert him in the very laſt extremity of nature; but a ſenſe of his maker's favour, and the proſpect of a happy immortality, muſt needs alleviate the weight of every affliction he ſuffers, and enable him to bear up, under the waſtings of a ſhattered, tottering conſtitution, with reſolution and conſtancy. And, ſurely, nothing can be more deſirable than to have relief from within, when all is dark and gloomy without.

Finally, the pleaſures of religion are of all others the moſt durable. We carry them always about with us, ready for uſe on every emergency. They are not

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enjoyed by ſtarts, nor require, in order to their being reliſhed, dull and tedious intervals of indolence, or painful expectation; but are a conſtant fund of delight. They never ſatiate, never grow flat on frequent uſe; but rather, more ſtrong, freſh, and lively.

But do any of theſe excellent properties belong to the pleaſures of the epicure? Are they not ſuperficial and momentary? Do they not end in loſs of appetite, and a ſtupid liſtleſſneſs at leaſt, if not in confuſion and remorſe? Will they not forſake us at death, and leave us entirely deſtitute of comfort in the eternal world? What then can be more wild and extravagant, than for a man to purchaſe them by debauching his reaſon, and forfeiting his honour, with the loſs of his innocence and peace, and of the pleaſures of religion that will continue for ever, and be revived, enlarged, and perfected, in the future ſtate?

Conſider this, be wiſe, and ſhew yourſelves men. Give up the baſe and unworthy gratifications of vice and ſenſuality, for the refined and god-like entertainments of virtue; for the calmneſs and evenneſs of an upright mind; and

the exalted pleaſure of doing good. Exchange the ſatisfactions of a brute for the joys of angels. Be ambitious to partake of the happineſs of God himſelf. This, reaſon and every principle of generoſity ſtrongly dictate: nay, conſult even your ſelf-love, and that will direct to it. But if for the ſake of irregular enjoyments, which are ſhort-lived, uncertain, and ſuperficial, you ſacrifice the nobleſt and pureſt pleaſures that human nature is capable of; your folly and wickedneſs will be inexcuſable.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

ON RELIGIOUS GRATITUDE.

PSALM ciii. 2.

Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul; and forget not all his benefits.

AS the exerciſe of gratitude, in return for benefits received, is moſt natural and agreeable to every ingenuous mind; ſo the moſt engaging character, in which we can conſider the ſupreme being, is that of a benefactor. Sovereign

authority may command obedience; and the idea of Almighty power enforce it: infinite grandeur and dignity of nature may impreſs awe: and infallible and all-comprehenſive wiſdom create admiration or aſtoniſhment: and other attributes may properly excite religious veneration. But goodneſs alone attracts love; and benefits received are the only foundation of gratitude. And, as the diſplays of infinite power and wiſdom throughout the ſtructure of the world are not more obvious to reaſon, or more the ſubject of human experience, than the effects of divine goodneſs; ſo every perſon in the world hath reaſon to ſay with the Pſalmiſt, "Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and forget not all his benefits."

We have ſufficient ground to believe, that the effects of that perfect and unlimited goodneſs, which is attributed to the ſupreme being, are adequate to the perfection of that attribute; that is, are infinite and endleſs. But whatever agreeable ſpeculations or probable conjectures we may entertain concerning the unknown effects of divine goodneſs in other ſtates and ſuperior worlds; yet the beneficial effects which we have obſerved and experien-

experienced are the only ground and motive of our gratitude: and it is our part to consider our own state, and to reflect upon the advantages we enjoy, and the blessings we derive from the divine favour to ourselves: not to ourselves exclusive of mankind around us, who are formed of the same nature, placed in the same state, and equally the creatures of God and the objects of his care and goodness with ourselves. For those benefits which we enjoy in common with others, our fellow-creatures, fellow-subjects, and fellow-christians, are the most proper ground of praise and gratitude to our common Lord and benefactor. It is the temper of many to put the least value upon those blessings which they partake of in common with many others, and to turn all their attention to some peculiar endowments or advantages which they fancy themselves to be possessed of above others, or some extraordinary mercies or blessings which they have singly obtained. Nothing strikes their attention but what is peculiar and singular: nothing moves their gratitude but something which they can appropriate to themselves, exclusive of their fellow-creatures. Life,

health, food, raiment, reſt, the light and warmth of the ſun, the wide proſpect of the creation, friends and relatives, are trivial bleſſings in their eſteem, and excite no grateful reflections; only becauſe they are common to mankind in general. This is the effect of vanity and ſelf-partiality; by which men are willing to confine the infinite goodneſs of God to themſelves, and value it only as far as they imagine it to be ſo confined. And many chriſtians have ſuffered this ſelfiſh and narrow diſpoſition to taint and vitiate the very principles of their chriſtian faith, and tempt them to appropriate the ſaving mercy of God in Chriſt Jeſus to themſelves; and to eſteem the goſpel principally becauſe they imagine it to contain a ſcheme of ſalvation calculated for their own party, excluſive of the reſt of mankind. But we may juſtly obſerve, that as all men are, ſtrictly ſpeaking, unworthy of that divine goodneſs which they actually enjoy; ſo ſuch ſelfiſh perſons are of all men the moſt unworthy: and they who are ſo willing to exclude their fellow-creatures from the benevolent and merciful regards of their common

mon Creator, do moſt of all deſerve to be excluded from it themſelves.

In conſidering then the grounds of our religious praiſe and gratitude to God, let us not dwell ſo much on any particular and extraordinary events, in which the divine providence hath ſeemed to diſtinguiſh us from others (for it is the property of weak and vain minds to arrogate to themſelves ſuch diſtinctions) but let us conſider the divine bounty as the ſpring of univerſal good, as the fountain which diffuſeth its ſtreams throughout the whole habitable world, enriching the earth, and refreſhing its numberleſs inhabitants. And if we enjoy a greater plenty than others, either of the temporal or ſpiritual means of happineſs; let this only ſerve to increaſe our gratitude, and excite alſo our benevolent deſires and prayers, that all men may partake in an equal or ſuperior degree of every bleſſing which the providence of God hath conferred upon us.

In reflecting upon the common benefits and ſatisfactions of life, and the conſtant and general effects of divine goodneſs, we may find an ample ſubject of religious praiſe and gratitude. The whole

happineſs

happineſs of life; every thing valuable and delightful; whatever is grateful to human ſenſe, great or amiable to the view, or engaging to the affections; whatever informs the underſtanding, entertains the imagination, or meliorates the temper; whatever reſtrains vice, and promotes virtue; whatever mitigates diſeaſe, preſerves health, or invigorates the faculties; whatever allays diſcord, cements ſociety, and eſtabliſheth ſocial and relative bliſs; theſe are all particular effects of that moſt impartial, unconfined and invariable goodneſs of God, who is benevolent to all, and "whoſe tender mercies are over all his works." When in the cheerful light of the day we view the ample creation around us; does not its very countenance beſpeak the goodneſs, as well as the power and grandeur of the Creator? It is his goodneſs, which makes heaven and earth to ſmile upon us; glows in the ſun, refreſheth in the breeze, diſtils in the fruitful rain, and aſcends in the copious harveſt. His bounty continually gives food to the hungry, cloathing to the naked, health to the ſick, and reſt to the weary. He ſupplies the vital current of life, and pours the tide of joy into the human heart.

heart. His wisdom formed and balanced the elements of the world, and made them subservient to the production and preservation of human life. His providence planned the constitution of human society, made man allied to man, and implanted in the human breast the pleasing affections of friends and kindred. The most engaging ties of nature, the tenderest and strongest emotions of parental affection, are an effect and image of his supreme and paternal goodness. And as this life, and whatever administers to the comfort and happiness of it, are the fruits of his beneficence; so all our hopes of another life, and of happiness in a world to come, are wholly founded in his original love and mercy to mankind. The same power, wisdom and goodness which formed the earth and the whole heavens, and which made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the whole face of the earth, established also that constitution which the christian revelation discloseth to us, according to which all mankind are raised from the dead by the power of the Saviour of the world, and endless life and happiness allotted to all good men. If our knowledge

ledge of the gospel served to no other happy end, than to rescue us from the slavish superstition of popery, or the stupid idolatry and the impure and barbarous rites of heathenism; how much reason should we have to congratulate ourselves, and acknowledge the favour of divine providence on that account! How much more; when it dispels the gloomy shades of death, and opens to us a prospect into a future state! when instead of the perplexing uncertainty or dark despair which oppressed the human mind, it raiseth us to so great and joyful hopes of the event of things after death, and of a glorious renovation of the state of mankind; when justice and clemency shall be administred in perfection, all the evils of this world abolished, and virtue and happiness forever established! What returns of praise and gratitude are due to the eternal giver of all life and happiness; who hath added to the provision, which his indulgent providence hath made for our infant-state in this world, the inestimable assurance of a world to come, and the inheritance of eternal life!

Such are the benefits derived to us from the divine goodness. The proper return

return for these benefits is doubtless sincere and fervent gratitude. And this is a return at once the most easy and natural in itself, and the most advantageous to us.

What can be easier than to give him thanks, and to receive his favours and enjoy them with grateful hearts? The debt of gratitude is indeed endless; "still owing, still to pay: but a grate-"ful mind in owing owes not, and "is at once indebted and discharged." The duty of gratitude can never cease; because the goodness is endless which obligeth: but this is no less our happiness than our duty. How then can men be continually receiving gifts and blessings at the hand of God, yet have no sense of his goodness, nor ever return the acknowledgments due to their divine benefactor? How can they, in the midst of prosperity, when all nature smiles upon them, when they are surrounded with grateful objects, and a confluence of delights is flowing in upon them; forget the fountain from whence these streams of life and happiness proceed, and be unmindful of that God "who is giving them all things richly to enjoy?"

Whence

Whence comes it to pafs, that they are then moft negligent of the Deity, and are the leaft willing to remember him? but when the fcene is changed, when diftrefs and anguifh come upon them, when they are furrounded with dangers and alarmed with fears, then and then only they begin to think of religion, become fenfible of that power which made them, implore the protection of his providence, and fly to his goodnefs, as their laft and only refuge? So the froward and pampered youth defpifes the indulgence of his parents, nor thinks himfelf obliged by their goodnefs: but when terrified by danger, or afflicted by difeafe, immediately calls on them for help and fuccour, and trufts himfelf to their care alone. But how weak and vain is it, how unbecoming our reafonable nature, how difingenuous and contrary to the difpofitions of a worthy mind, to fhew no gratitude in return for the greateft benefits! to have the lefs fenfe of divine goodnefs, the more we experience it! to be moft unthankful for thofe bleffings which occur the moft frequently and in the greateft abundance! and at the fame time moft readily to acknowledge God when he

he with-holds his favours, and inflicts chaſtiſements upon us; and truſt entirely to his goodneſs, when we have entirely forfeited it! to be atheiſts while God is ſhowering down his bleſſings upon us; and to grow religious and devout when he hath taken them away! How ſervile, mean and odious is this temper; which is only to be driven by fear, and can never be won by goodneſs!

Let us attend alſo to the excellency and happy effects of a grateful diſpoſition towards the ſupreme Being. As ingratitude is the vice of ignoble minds, and which none but mean and ſelfiſh ſpirits are capable of; ſo gratitude is the ſpontaneous produce of a worthy mind, and always takes root and flouriſheth in a generous heart. The more goodneſs men have in themſelves, they are uſually the more ſenſible of goodneſs in others, and the more attracted by its influence; and when they find themſelves the objects of it, are the more eaſily and ſtrongly affected with grateful ſentiments. While they whoſe hearts are ſtrangers to generous principles and affections, and who are themſelves deſtitute of goodneſs, are wilfully blind to it in others, and often

ten endeavour to traduce and vilify it. Hence they become inſenſible of obligations; and either have no gratitude, or endeavour to weaken the ſenſe and looſen the ties of it, by aſcribing the benefits they have received from others to any other motive rather than that of benevolence or generoſity.

And the effects are as different as the temper and principles of mind from which they ſpring. Ingratitude is uſually accompanied with envy and diſcontent: while a grateful temper is beſt qualified both to enjoy its own peculiar bleſſings, and to participate in thoſe of others. The ungrateful man never thinks that God or men have been ſufficiently kind and liberal to him; or that he is obliged by any benefits conferred, while any are withheld; and is thankful for nothing, becauſe he has not every thing. Inſtead of enjoying his own poſſeſſions, he envies thoſe of others. Inſtead of thinking himſelf happy that heaven has beſtowed ſo much upon him, he is unhappy becauſe it has beſtowed no more. Nothing can ſatisfy his ungrateful and diſcontented mind, unleſs all mankind would bow down before him and ſerve him, and heaven

heaven itſelf exhauſt its boundleſs treaſures to enrich and bleſs him alone, excluſive of the world beſides. But a man of a grateful temper is eaſily ſatisfied, and well-diſpoſed for happineſs. He is pleaſed with the good will and ſervice of his fellow-creatures, without forming unreaſonable expectations from them; enjoys the gifts of divine providence, without repining for what it has not given; is happy in his own advantages, without envying thoſe of others; has the higher reliſh of every bleſſing the more common it is to others; and contemplates the divine goodneſs with the greater delight, the more it appears to be diffuſed throughout the world, and extenſive as the creation. Inſtead of engroſſing to himſelf the divine favour and liberality, he is ſtruck with a grateful aſtoniſhment, that ſo inſignificant a creature as himſelf is an object of the care and goodneſs of an infinite Being: and that amidſt the immenſe grandeur and multiplicity of the works of God, and the innumerable ſuperior and more worthy objects of his regard, himſelf ſhould nevertheleſs enjoy ſo large a proportion of the divine bounty: and that, while the wants and deſires

of

of millions of creatures in various ſtates and worlds are to be ſupplied out of the ſtores of nature, yet the elements of the world and all nature around him, are, at the ſame time, formed with ſo wonderful a ſubſervience to his own particular ſupport and benefit. Much more, when he conceives of himſelf as deſigned for immortality; and is aſſured by the goſpel, that the divine goodneſs to mankind in general, and to himſelf in particular, ſhall not terminate at death, but be inconceivably augmented, and endleſly diverſified in the unknown ſcenes of the inviſible and boundleſs univerſe; his heart becomes dilated and animated with the higheſt eſteem of the divine goodneſs, the warmeſt gratitude for preſent benefits, and the moſt joyful hopes of future happineſs. No tranſient clouds of adverſity, no dark proſpect of approaching diſeaſe or death, can deſtroy either his grateful remembrance of paſt mercies, or his hope of final deliverance and ſalvation.

To conclude: Gratitude is a debt due to every benefactor in proportion to the benefits we have received from him, and the benevolence of intention with which he

he confers them. The ſmalleſt favour merits a return of thanks: and the mere intention of obliging, ſeparate from the act, deſerves a grateful acceptance. Where benefits then have been actually conferred, and of the moſt ſubſtantial and valuable nature; where favours have been multiplied and inceſſantly repeated, all proceeding from the pureſt motive of benevolence and the wiſeſt regard to our welfare and happineſs; there the obligations to gratitude are proportionally enhanced. But the divine benefits, we are certain, can proceed from no other motive than that of perfect goodneſs; and comprehend, in number and value, all, and much more than we can poſſibly receive from any other benefactors. And, in God, the ſovereign author of all good, all the moſt reſpectable and engaging characters among men, of protector, governor, ſaviour, friend, and father, are united. If gratitude then be due to any earthly benefactor, or in return for any gifts which men can beſtow; how much more to him, whoſe inſtruments they are, who is the giver of all things, the original author of every bleſſing, by whatever

whatever perſon or medium it is conveyed to us? Nothing then can be more becoming us, or conduce more to our advantage and happineſs, than to cultivate a grateful affection towards the beſt of beings, in return for the numberleſs and various inſtances of his goodneſs to us; and as a qualification for receiving more and larger effects of his favour. To this we are excited, not only by a ſenſe of duty, but by the ties of nature, the motives of ingenuity, the pleaſures of a grateful mind, and the hopes of happineſs.

Let us then frequently call to mind, and gratefully celebrate, the conſtant ſeries and numberleſs effects of the divine goodneſs, to ourſelves in particular, and to mankind in general. Let us conſtantly and cheerfully pay our public tribute of homage, adoration, and thankſgiving to our common creator and benefactor. "Let us now magnify the Lord, and exalt his name together; let us give thanks unto him, and bleſs his holy name: let us ſing praiſes to our God, and extol him in the congregation of the people. O that men would praiſe the

"Lord

" Lord for his goodneſs, and for his won-
" derful works to the children of men."
And let every one ſay to himſelf with
ſincere and fervent gratitude, " bleſs the
" Lord, O my ſoul; and forget not all
" his benefits."

SERMON XV.

HAMAN AND MORDECAI.

ESTHER v. 13.

Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

IN these words complained Haman the favourite of Ahasuerus, the king of Persia. This powerful prince had raised him up from a mean estate to the highest

rank and dignity; conferred on him peculiar honours, and diſtinguiſhed him from all the nobles and princes of his court. In this exalted condition he was reverenced by all excepting Mordecai the Jew; who reſolutely declined the expected homage. To inquire after the cauſe of this ſingular diſreſpect, would be loſs of time; as being a point of mere curioſity, and no conſequence. Whatever Mordecai's reaſons might be, we find Haman highly incenſed at him. The indignity appeared ſo great, and the affront ſo heinous, that he was not content to mark out the offender alone as an object of vengeance. This he judged not ſufficient ſatisfaction; and therefore meditated a more ample revenge by deſtroying all the Jews in the kingdom. This reſolution, unjuſt and cruel as it was, was brought very near the point of execution; and would, in all probability have been accompliſhed, had not providence remarkably interpoſed, and turned the intended ruin on his own head.

From hence we might take a proper occaſion of conſidering the miſerable influences of pride and ambition; which intoxicate men's minds with high conceits, make

make them insolent and outrageous, and willing to burst all the bonds of humanity, on the slightest and most trivial occasions. They lose all patience, when any thing stands in their way, or tends to reduce those swelling ideas which they form of themselves. From hence likewise we might observe the pernicious effects of ungoverned rage; which, being once kindled, often mounts into a mighty flame, and spreads destruction far and wide. We might also take notice, from the event of this history, of the justice and wisdom of divine providence; which confounds the devices of the crafty, and condemns them to fall into those very snares which they lay for others. Though this life be not properly a state of retribution; yet it affords many instances of vengeance providentially executed on those, who give themselves up to unrighteous measures and inhuman practices. These and the like reflections might be drawn from the incidents of this historical passage. But I shall confine myself at present to the two following observations, which more immediately arise from the declaration in my text.

Firſt then I obſerve, that however kind providence may have been to us; it frequently happens that one ſingle misfortune, and that too a gentle one, is ſufficient to blaſt all our bleſſings; to make us inſenſible of God's goodneſs, and regardleſs of his benefits. We may read, in the verſes preceding the text, what great honours and advantages Haman was poſſeſſed of; the glory of his riches; the multitude of his children; his promotion and advancement above the reſt of his princes; in ſhort, every diſtinction, every inſtance of favour, that he could wiſh, or the king confer. Yet, it ſeems, all this proſperity availed him nothing, while he had the mortification of being ſlighted by Mordecai the Jew. We may wonder perhaps at ſuch a turn and temper of mind, and even reflect on it with indignation and aſtoniſhment; never ſuſpecting that we ourſelves are ever chargeable with the like folly and extravagance. But if we examined our own hearts, we ſhould ſometimes diſcover too near a reſemblance. Though we may not poſſeſs ſuch an affluence, nor enjoy ſuch dignities and diſtinctions; we may nevertheleſs be really proſperous in a lo-

a lower ſphere. We may ſhare largely the favours of providence, and boaſt a great variety of bleſſings: in which condition it often happens, that one croſs accident gives us more diſquiet and diſcontent, than all our enjoyments can yield ſatisfaction. Theſe are all overlooked for a time, and our thoughts wholly employed in ruminating on the other. On ſuch occaſions we indulge a fooliſh vexation, and are apt to think with Jonah, that we do well to be angry. But

Secondly, not only real misfortunes produce ſuch effects; even imaginary ones are frequently ſufficient for that purpoſe. Had Haman incurred ſome grievous diſaſter, ſome dire calamity, we ſhould leſs have wondered, and more eaſily have accounted for the diſturbance it gave him. But ſurely this was not his caſe. If his was really a misfortune, it was a misfortune of his own making. For what evil had befallen him, excepting the ſmart of his own folly? His mind was galled by a ſecret wiſh, which he knew not how to accompliſh; and if he had, no good conſequence of any kind was to be expected; but in all probability much damage and diſadvantage.

What he ſo earneſtly and paſſionately wiſhed, was only the gratification of a proud inſolent humour: and yet, it ſeems, without this, he could neither enjoy himſelf, nor any thing that belonged to him. All his good fortune was vaniſhed out of his ſight, and wealth, honour, grandeur, availed him nothing. Such a diſpoſition, and ſuch a conduct, however ſtrange they may ſeem, are not uncommon among men. When we are in adverſity, we are generally reſtleſs, impatient, full of anxieties and complaints; and when we riſe above it, and our circumſtances are improved, it is oftentimes done to very little purpoſe. Whatever our condition be, ſomething or other is commonly wanting to ſatisfy our minds, and ſet them at reſt. When we are preſſed with indigence and hardſhip, we are apt to think if we could but emerge, and once lift our heads above diſtreſs, we ſhould not only be contented, but thankful. If providence would be pleaſed to grant us what we call neceſſaries, we ſhould chearfully ſit down, and diſquiet ourſelves no further. Well; our point is gained, and more than gained: what follows? Does it produce the effect we propoſed and promiſed?

miſed? Is our contentment, gratitude, complacency, viſible to all about us? Alas! this is ſeldom the caſe. As our condition changes, we change; when our old wiſhes and deſires are anſwered, new ones ſtart up; which diſcompoſe us full as much as the former, and engage us in the ſame toils and troubleſome purſuits. Though the grievances we complained of are effectually removed, yet we ſoon provide ourſelves with a freſh ſet. Either ſomething remains which we earneſtly covet, and know not how to obtain; or ſome petty misfortune happens which we cannot well bear: for a ſmall matter will ſerve to diſquiet us in the day of proſperity. Thoſe leſſer difficulties which appeared before ſcarce worthy of our notice, are now magnified into great hardſhips; and almoſt any thing affords a cauſe for complaint. In ſhort, as we contrive matters, there is often very little difference between proſperity and adverſity. In adverſity we ſuffer thoſe hardſhips which it pleaſes God's providence to lay upon us; and in proſperity we ſuffer thoſe which we are pleaſed to lay upon ourſelves: and as the latter are more numerous, ſo they are often

ten more pungent than the former. And indeed thoſe evils which are not real, but fantaſtical, ſeem to be invented by us on purpoſe to make ourſelves more miſerable than we need to be. We ſet our hearts on many things, and are paſſionately fond of them, though they gratify no one natural deſire, but entirely owe their value to our imaginations: and the want of theſe is frequently our capital grievance: creating us more trouble, and torment, and vexation, than we ever endure from the moſt ſubſtantial calamities. In a low ſtate of life, our wants being natural, our wiſhes are commonly the ſame; and we have then neither leiſure nor inclination to gratify our humours, and indulge our fancies. But when our natural deſires are once provided for, our minds generally take a new turn; looking out for other objects, and freſh entertainment. Theſe we purſue with ſuch eagerneſs and impatience, that the want of ſucceſs becomes inſupportable, every diſappointment gives great pain, and pierces to the quick. The many real bleſſings and ſolid advantages which we poſſeſs, are all diſregarded. Our great concern is, that ſome particular humour remains

remains ungratified: on which account we ridiculouſly give ourſelves up to an unnatural grief, and refuſe to be comforted. Such reflections as theſe plainly offer themſelves on a view of Haman's caſe, as repreſented by himſelf in the words of my text. Let us now go on to conſider the impiety and folly of ſuch a conduct.

Firſt the impiety of it; as it evidently implies great ingratitude towards God, and an impious oppoſition to his will. When God has been graciouſly pleaſed to fix a man in a fair and flouriſhing condition; to confer on him innumerable favours, and bleſs him almoſt to the height of his wiſhes; ought not ſuch obligations excite a ſtrong ſenſe of gratitude? Or if that be too much, ought they not at leaſt to baniſh all diſcontent, and make him bear chearfully thoſe troubles and croſſes which are incident to every ſtate of human life? If a real misfortune befall him, is he not bound, doubly bound, to endure and ſubmit? To repine at ſuch a diſpenſation in his circumſtances, and murmur in the midſt of ſo many bleſſings, cannot but appear highly unreaſonable and ungrateful. Perhaps God

ſaw fit "to chaſten him this once, that "he might humble him, and prove him." Perhaps ſuch a chaſtiſement was neceſſary; and though for the preſent not joyous but grievous, yet it might turn at length to a moſt deſirable account, and deſerve to be numbered among his chief bleſſings. However, to ſet this conſideration aſide, and not to mention his ſins and provocations, which give him at all times juſt cauſe to apprehend ſeverer treatment; I would only aſk, whether one ſingle ſtroke of adverſity be ſufficient to cancel all his obligations, and blot out every mercy that he has received? In how unjuſt, how unequal a balance, does that man weigh the diſpenſations of heaven, who ſuffers one misfortune, or more than one, to turn the ſcale againſt ten thouſand bleſſings!

But to proceed; if it argue ſo much ingratitude in any man, to repine and ſtruggle in a proſperous condition, when a real calamity befalls him; what ſhall we ſay or think of him, who ſinks under an imaginary grievance, and provokes heaven every hour with idle complaints, and groundleſs lamentations? For this indeed is the caſe before us, as I have already

already taken notice. And what can be ſaid to excuſe, or even extenuate ſuch extreme perverſeneſs? Becauſe ſome little event happens croſs to our inclinations, is this enough to corrupt our enjoyments, and extinguiſh all ſenſe of the divine bounty? Becauſe we cannot have our will in every thing, muſt we therefore, like froward children, repine at the providence of God, and grow ſad and ſullen we know not why? Inſtead of gladneſs, behold uneaſineſs! inſtead of praiſes and acknowledgments, murmurs and complaints! Whence comes it to paſs, that the great, the powerful Haman droops and languiſhes all on a ſudden? What occaſions his deep diſcontent, and makes him ſit down in ſorrow and ſadneſs? Why, a certain Jew has affronted him, and he wants to be revenged; and if God will not give him an opportunity, he may revoke his gifts, and withdraw his bleſſings. And accordingly he did ſo: not only his riches and his honours, but his life too. The ſame ignominious inſtrument which he had contrived for the death of Mordecai, is appointed by Providence for his own; and his ſhame and puniſhment rendered

as

as conſpicuous as his former honour and proſperity. This may teach us, beyond any arguments, the iniquity and guilt of ſuch a temper, and ſuch a conduct. God is ever good and gracious to the children of men; ever ready to promote their welfare: but "he has no pleaſure in fools." He will not proſper ungrateful men againſt their wills; nor make thoſe happy, who take great pains to make themſelves miſerable. "His ſpirit will not always ſtrive" with our crooked humours, and capricious inclinations. If his gifts are loſt upon us, and his favours turn to no account; what wonder if he reſume them? Can we expect or imagine, that he ſhould gratify all our deſires, whether reaſonable or unreaſonable, wiſe or fooliſh? Is it not a great indignity to the divine majeſty, to ſuppoſe that he ſhould concur in all our idle purpoſes and vain projects? Surely it is enough, if he grant us what is really fitting for us; if he give us a liberal ſhare of his bleſſings, and thereby place happineſs in our power, and within our reach. If this will not ſatisfy our minds, and make us eaſy, we are notoriouſly guilty of the moſt horrid ingratitude; and

and without queſtion grievouſly offend God, who has been ſo bountiful to us in vain.

The ſecond point to be conſidered is the folly of ſuch a temper, and ſuch a conduct. And here I might obſerve, that the very charge laſt mentioned includes this. That practice, by which we incur the indignation of heaven, muſt be in the higheſt degree fooliſh, becauſe fatal; as depriving us of the bleſſings we enjoy, and expoſing us to ſevere judgments. But this is not all; for it makes men miſerable, whether God execute vengeance or not; and indeed is itſelf a moſt grievous puniſhment. As it is a joyful and "pleaſant thing to be thankful;" ſo to be unthankful and querulous, is vexation itſelf. Whatever ſtate a man is in, common prudence obliges him to maintain, as well as he can, the tranquility of his own mind. Impatience never does good. On the contrary, it doubles every misfortune, and turns even the gentleſt griefs into adverſity and wretchedneſs. On which account all wiſe men avoid it as much as poſſible in trouble and diſtreſs. And if they guard againſt it in diſtreſs, ſurely they can never give

way

way to it in prosperity. Nevertheless we find great numbers uneasy and unhappy in the most flourishing condition. Too many, to all appearance, seek out for causes and occasions of discontent. They seem, as it were, industrious in the pursuit of artificial griefs; and when they have reached them, are no longer able to enjoy themselves; but complain, in the very wantonness of lamentation, of their unfortunate state, and hard lot. Shall we call this folly, or something worse? How is it possible for rational creatures to behave in so extravagant, so absurd a manner? When the comforts of life are put into our hands; shall we throw them away, and take up crosses instead of them? Can we find in our hearts, in spite of nature and common sense, to become voluntiers in trouble and misery? Most certainly it is not in our power to despise or undervalue happiness. Nay, we must unavoidably and necessarily desire it at all times. Yet we often seek it as if we did not desire it: that is, we frequently fail and fall short, when we might succeed if we pleased. Refusing to follow the order of nature, we would either be happy our own way,

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or not at all. Hence it is that we so eagerly follow our own inventions, and then are angry when they mislead us. Is it then for this only that the bustle of the world is carried on? Do we build so many schemes of happiness, merely for the childish pleasure of pulling them down? "What profit shall we" thus "have of all the labour that we take "under the sun?" In short, as the choice and pursuit of proper means to make ourselves happy, is true wisdom; so the use of such means as plainly tend to make us miserable, is the very essence of folly.

From what has been said we may plainly perceive, that no man's happiness depends chiefly on his outward condition. Let any man be surrounded with the advantages of life: let him have health, wealth, and honour, to the extent of his wishes: yet if his mind be out of order; he shall still be discontented, still miserable. If outward blessings could have procured happiness, surely Haman had never wanted it. For what worldly good did he not possess; and that in great abundance? But his mind was not answerable to the prosperity of his condition,

on, and therefore it availed him nothing. The truth is, when a man's own heart pronounces a curſe upon him, Providence bleſſes him in vain. Many things without us may contribute to our well-being, if we will give them leave; but they will not, they cannot make us happy againſt our wills. "Man's life conſiſteth "not," as our Saviour informs us, "in "the abundance of the things which he "poſſeſſeth." That is, the true comfort and enjoyment of life is not principally owing to external goods; and therefore muſt be ſought for elſewhere.

It highly concerns us then to take great care of the frame and diſpoſition of our minds; for this is the true ground of happineſs, and no other ſolid foundation can any man lay. When we employ our hands in providing worldly goods, and at the ſame time neglect our hearts, we take a certain method to loſe our labour. However we may ſucceed as to the means, we ſhall ſurely be diſappointed of our end. Should we proſper and flouriſh beyond all our hopes; ſhould we raiſe our condition as high as Haman's; yet if we govern ourſelves as weakly as he did, there is juſt cauſe to fear

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we may perish as wretchedly. On the other hand, if our minds are rightly disposed; we are then proper objects of the divine bounty. The blessings which God sends will then be truly such, and we shall reap that satisfaction from them which he intends we should. If he pour into our hands abundance, it will not be lost upon us: and a much lesser portion will content us, and even make us happy. Whatever we possess, we shall make the most of it, in the true sense of the word. The sweets of prosperity we shall then taste unmixed; at least we shall mingle no bitter ingredient ourselves. In short, a distempered mind, like a vitiated stomach, is apt to corrupt all it receives; but wisdom and virtue give a just relish of the gifts of heaven, and season every enjoyment. When it was offered to king Solomon's choice what blessing he would receive; we find him rejecting all outward goods, and pitching upon wisdom: a plain indication that he was no stranger to the gift before he asked it. For indeed "a wise and understanding heart" comprehends almost every thing. It directs a man to all that is truly good, and qualifies him to enjoy it

it to the beſt advantage. Without this, the moſt proſperous condition is uncomfortable; and with it, even adverſity is tolerable. The wiſe man equally underſtands how to bear a low ſtation, or become a high one: knows "how to want, and how to abound;" and whatever ſtate he is in, to promote God's glory, and his own true good.

Let us therefore labour for wiſdom, which will guide our feet in every path of life, which will ſupport and direct us in all ſtates, and every ſituation. And ſince, whenever we obtain it, it muſt come from above; let us in imitation of the royal pattern before-mentioned, aſk it of God; "who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not:" humbly beſeeching him, that amidſt his manifold gifts he will not leave us deſtitute of his grace, to uſe them always to his honour and glory, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord! Amen.

The END *of* VOL. II.

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